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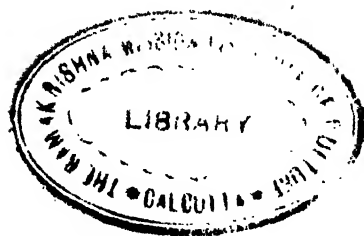
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BITTERSWEET



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

CAVIARE

NINTH EDITION

"My compliments and thanks to Mr Grant Richards, publisher and author. I made one meal of his 'Caviare,' and finished it in bed at four o'clock in the morning. For a few cheerful hours it made me forget I was living in England. . . . The thrill of the gambling chapters, and the charm of Alison, and the cool and adroit assurance of the young Englishman who wins her for his bride, make a delightfully entertaining novel."—Punch.

"'Caviare' is a brilliant tour de force. Mr Grant Richards is master of the exact word, the apt phrase. His hero's adventure in connection with American railway stock is the finest and most exciting piece of gambling we have ever heard of. One character is a masterpiece; she crosses the stage a couple of times, and hardly speaks a dozen lines, but we shall not readily forget her."—Daily Mail.

VALENTINE

TENTH THOUSAND

"A story which is not only interesting in the title sense of the word, but really interesting in that it adds to the stock of human knowledge in an agreeable and original manner. Mr Grant Richards has evidently a good knowledge of London life, and he looks on it with the eye of a discriminating judge of manners and words and with the eye of an artist. He sees himself, and makes his readers see what he sees. But enough said; 'Valentine' is a book to buy and read."—Morning Post.

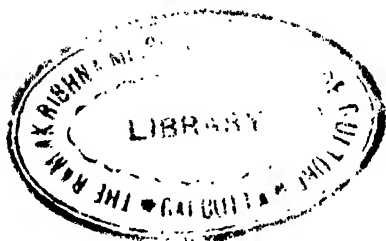
GRANT RICHARDS LTD.
PUBLISHERS
LONDON

BITTERSWEET.

BY

GRANT RICHARDS

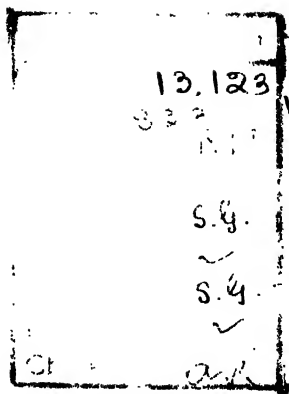
AUTHOR OF "CAVIARE"



LONDON

GRANT RICHARDS LTD.

1915



TO
MY MOTHER

BOOK I

Comme ils sont heureux, les amoureux.

BOOK II

La vie est dure et amère, et les femmes sont chères.

BOOK III

. . . tout lasse.

BOOK I

Comme ils sont heureux, les amoureux.

CHAPTER I

IN the blossoming weeks of early summer Wimbledon seems no unreasonable place to live in. Its roads are not the country, but they have green trees and gardens in which flowers grow. Houses are not expensive, and in less than an hour one can reach the Strand. The fields and field-paths are within striking distance, and yet the theatres are not so far away but that one feels oneself able to keep in touch with what is going on. One need not stagnate. . . .

Something of this kind was running through Gerard Blundell's head as he walked up from the station to The Haver, Acacia Road, at half-past six on the evening of June 15th in the year 1912. He had had a hard day. There had been plenty to do at the office—he was the junior partner in a rather well-known firm of wine merchants in Pall Mall—and just at the busiest time he had had to take an hour off to see a specialist in Harley Street, one of those delightful, solicitous, and forgetful old gentlemen who seem to exist for the sole purpose of talking to patients; whose mental interests and capacity are not to be gauged by the out-of-date weekly papers which cumber the tables of the rooms in which

one has to force oneself to believe that they ever dine ; and who have apparently the knack of attracting to their service the neatest and most capable parlour-maids. Dr Arbuthnot had told Gerard Blundell that all his fears were unnecessary, but that he had evidently been overdoing things, that his system must be helped to get rid of its excessive uric acid or serious trouble might result, and that he had better take a cure.

Certainly it was rather a nuisance, but better now than later. Blundell had gone back and had told his partners what the doctor had said, and they had both pointed out to him that if he was to go he had better go quickly, that a cure need not, even with an after-cure, take more than six weeks, and that with a very little re-arrangement of their holiday dates no one would be inconvenienced. Did Arbuthnot recommend any particular place? Aix-les-Bains. "You wouldn't be dull there, anyway," Pontifex, the senior partner, a much older man, had remarked. "It's very hot and very pretty. I was there with poor Jessica before she died. Perhaps it's altered now. I remember I lost a lot of money in the Cercle. That's not in your line, Blundell. Anyhow, go back and fix things up at home, and then the sooner you start the better."

All the same, Gerard Blundell was a little uneasy. To look at him you would not have thought there was much need of his going away for a cure. He was tall enough, and well set up ; he was clean-shaven, and his eyes required no assistance ; his face was that of a healthy man, and was less lined than his age, thirty-five, might have excused. Just now as he walked, carrying

a brown leather despatch case, but not otherwise looking very much of a business man, he was unconsciously frowning at his thoughts. In the first place, he did not want to go to Aix—now, or at any time: he liked to take his holiday with his children and his wife, and he certainly could not afford to carry them with him into Savoy; in the second, there were, in spite of what his partners had said, a lot of things in Pall Mall which he alone could look after, projects he had himself initiated which were only too likely to die of inanition if he left them for so long at this particular time. And there was a third perplexity—his wife. He loved her dearly, but somehow or other she was growing old too fast, becoming too fixed, hardening in some way. He did not think it could be because she saw too little of the world. They knew plenty of people in Wimbledon and in London—almost too many; she went to town a good deal; she was not a fool. But she was growing older in a way that he could not believe natural in a woman of only thirty-four, even though she had had the care and trouble of three children; and she was failing to keep her mind brushed up and alert. He wished he knew what was the matter. And his going to Aix would not help. He was sure that Mary would try to be cheerful about it, but she would resent it all the same: she would resent the interruption to the ordinary course of their year; she would dislike his not being able after all to go with her and the children to Bude as they had planned, she would not approve of so much money being spent on what after all must be a problematic good. Yes, sometimes certainly Mary was

trying, but all the same she was a dear and they had never quarrelled and they never need quarrel. It was his business to see to that. He would make it up to her in some way now that he had to go off on his own account. Perhaps, later in the year, they could take together that holiday in France or Italy that had always hung encouragingly in the future. He thought that a woman who had had three children could be excused a certain moodiness. In a little while she would be all right again, no doubt.

Gerard Blundell's father had been a soldier. A widower and an old man of some fame and of great personal distinction, he had died when Gerard, the elder of two sons, was still at school. Leaving enough money to start both boys in life, he had left also one recommendation—that neither should feel himself under any obligation to follow his father's example and enter the army. Gerard went from school to Oxford, and then forthwith elected for commerce; his brother, Gervase, two years his junior, was at Oxford too, but he preferred to go to the Bar, where it was thought that his consistent and cold-blooded selfishness and his quite infernal cheek would make him an opening without more delay than was absolutely necessary, and that after a seemly interval he could enter Parliament—he would be Liberal or Conservative according to which party at the moment offered the best prospects—achieve cabinet rank, marry the daughter of a political peer—and so on. To finish with Gervase first. He had so far carried out his programme to the letter, except that he had married before he had made much headway in the House, and

that just now unfortunately he was under something of an eclipse, the political peer's daughter having tired of her young husband's egoism and run away, in the fourth year of their marriage, with a new playwright whose comedies were almost as hard and brilliant as Gervase Blundell's best speeches. 'Of course he had divorced her. It was a very great nuisance, and the scandal did him harm, put him back. It is inadvisable for politicians to make even an innocent appearance in the court in which such knots are untied. Unhappily as it turned out, not foreseeing this development in his domestic fortunes, he had elected to be a Liberal, and the average Liberal, especially in the provinces, has no breadth of view. Luckily there were no children, and Gervase, who had never cared extravagantly for his wife and who could do very well without any permanent woman in his life unless she could advance his prospects, gave up his house, took chambers in the Albany, exhibited a very cynical and disenchanted view of all feminine questions, and managed very quickly, as some sop to his damaged conceit, to attain the reputation of a man whom few women could withstand. For the rest, he saw very little of his elder brother, whose suburban menage he could not help feeling reflected rather on his own eminence and distinction, and whom he looked down on as a mere man of commerce who did not even make any great success of the not specially creditable trade he had chosen. This indifference of fraternal feeling was not shared by Gerard. He both liked and was proud of his younger brother and refused to believe in his cynicism or his selfishness. "People don't understand old

Gervase," he would tell Mary, his wife; "all that stuff he talks is only his way. He's got a heart of gold really. But he's sensitive, and when that woman went off he curled up like—like—oh, what's that animal that goes into a dark corner and dies when it loses what it loves?" It is no doubt good for even the most selfish of us to have someone to believe in the essential nobility of our characters. But one did not need to be an acute observer to realise that dying in a dark corner was not exactly Gervase Blundell's form. And while the younger brother had been, except for the temporary handicap of his domestic misadventure, getting on like a house on fire at the Bar and in the councils of his party, Gerard, the elder, had been throwing himself heart and soul into commerce and had certainly not succeeded in setting the Thames alight. He had not chosen wine as the subject of his energies fortuitously or without a deal of thought. When he was preparing to leave Oxford he possessed a certain capital. The question had been to what use he should apply it. Assuredly he did not propose to invest it soberly and use the interest as an aid to a comfortable life. His idea from the first had been to employ it to break into some interesting business. Publishing had occurred to him. He liked the arts, and to be a publisher surely meant that his concern would be with the things of the intellect. Inquiry, however, led him to be a little shy of putting his money into a trade half of whose members always seemed to be wringing their hands about the future of the book business, cutting one another's throats in the pursuit of cheapness, and constantly becoming embroiled either

with the public or the distributors on questions of "terms" or propriety. He came to the conclusion, after several interviews with spry and amiable or stuffy and obviously incapable gentlemen in the neighbourhood of Paternoster Row and other publishing centres, that the business, as a business, was not sufficiently stable or optimistic, and that before he parted with any of his good money and burned his boats he would like to find some trade which was not so obviously overcrowded and prone to pessimism. Picture dealing? Well, he loved painting too much, he told himself, to care to start on a life of handling second-rate stuff, as most dealers, he suspected, had to do. Besides, it was too jolly risky. What else was left that combined commerce and romance, trade and the pleasures of a man of taste? The theatre? No, a thousand times no: he had watched friends of his go to pieces after the most casual connection with the O.U.D.S. and the methods of the playhouse.

It was an Oxford friend of his, to whom at the end of his fourth year he was confiding the perplexities of his position, who, taking down "The Rubáiyát" from his shelf and reading out the eternal question:

"I often wonder what the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the Stuff they sell?"

had put wine into his head. True, the wine trade was in its way as depressed as the publishing. Most people confined their reading to books from the circulating libraries and only drank whisky or cheap claret. But wine remained a marketable commodity. A bottle of wine was not like an unappreciated six-shilling novel:

its value did not fall in a night from three-and-sixpence to threepence halfpenny. Yes, surely his capital would be safer locked up in thousands of bottles of what are called "choice vintages" than in advances to authors who perhaps would never produce the work for which they had contracted or in masses of printed sheets that no power on earth could ever make the public want. Gerard Blundell, even before he left Oxford, was a knowledgeable young man: he did not propose to handicap himself at the start by any false step. And wine, besides being when properly treated a safe sort of business, was, if looked at with the eye of youth, truly romantic. If people did not drink as much wine as they used, it was because the matter was not handled with sufficient enthusiasm and imagination.

So Gerard Blundell began to look about him for a house which would take him on trial for a year or two and would then, if he shaped properly and was still of the same mind, give him a suitable partnership in exchange for his youth, his work, and ten thousand pounds.

And luckily, through his College Bursar's introduction, he found such a house at the first attempt. Pontifex, Mathews and Merrick—it became Pontifex, Mathews and Blundell when later on Gerard did purchase his partnership—was a fine old crusted firm, going back a hundred years or more, having high traditions of its own and enthusiasm for the traditions of the trade. Since its foundation there had been a Pontifex in the business, and no Pontifex would ever have connived at the substitution of Algerian or Spanish wines for the

more valuable products of the Medoc. If such a thing was ever done in Pall Mall one could be sure that it was kept from the Pontifex ears. The existing Pontifex was sixty-four years old, was corpulent, wore whiskers, and was seldom seen without a silk hat of the shape sported in the time of the Regent. Such a distinction gave him character and was, his partner, Harry Mathews, liked to remember, rather an advertisement for the firm. It was Mr Pontifex who had been to Aix.

Gerard Blundell threw himself into the wine business with enthusiasm. It began by amusing and ended by interesting him as no other trade was likely to have done. In energy, in zeal, in imagination, he put into it a great deal more than he ever took out in the more vulgar form of pounds, shillings, and pence. But that was no one's fault. Good wine might be a rising market but the wine trade was not what it had been. Prices were closer; the public demand certainly did not increase; as one connoisseur after another on the books of the firm removed his gouty soul to a different sphere his place was not filled up. As likely as not his son was a water-drinker or had built himself a house in which the architect had been allowed to forget that no gentleman's residence should be without proper cellarage.

Nevertheless Gerard made a decent living. He was much younger than either of his partners—Mathews was over fifty—and he brought a lot of energy into the house and a number of ideas which gradually he was allowed to carry out without interference. He really believed that it would be enormously to the advantage of the Englishman if he could be induced to drink pure

and light wine instead of heavier or more spirituous beverages, and he created quite a sensation in the trade generally and in the circles in which most of the firm's customers moved by the issue of a circular, to which he had induced his partners, after much argument and delay, to allow the firm's signature to be appended, in which Pontifex, Mathews and Blundell said once and for all that they refused in future to supply their customers with whisky. That drink might be all very well in the right place but that place was not on the table of the amateur of wine. If you drank whisky you spoiled your palate for wine. Barley and the grape were as the poles apart. If their customers wanted whisky they could send to the Stores for it. No longer would Pontifex, Mathews and Blundell palter with their obvious duty. The circular proved an excellent advertisement. It lost them some customers, but it brought in more. Gerard had intended that it should be talked about, and it was.

And now after thirteen years in the wine trade Gerard Blundell had no true cause to quarrel with fate. He liked his work; he loved his wife; he dearly loved his three children. It was true that the doctor had ordered him away, but that after all was nothing to worry over. His only serious preoccupation was about his wife—and that was simply because he hated to see her fretting about quite unnecessary things, and he hated to see her growing older under his eyes when surely with a woman of thirty-four the very idea of middle age was ridiculous.

Certainly he was not growing older himself.

CHAPTER II

NO sooner had Gerard Blundell turned the corner of the road in which he lived than the gate of his garden was flung open and a girl of ten, teeth clenched, hands outstretched, hair waving behind, ran at the height of her speed to meet him. He caught her with his free arm and kissed the lips which she held up to him.

“Well, Vivian, are you any better to-day?”

“Why, you know, I haven’t been ill lately, Daddy. But I want to tell you. Look! Mummy says we may all go to the circus on Saturday if you’ll take us. Will you? Do say ‘Yes.’”

“I’ll think of it, my dear. We’ll see. I’ll try, but it may be impossible. How’s Dickie?”

“I don’t know. He hasn’t come back from school. It’s a cricket day. If you’d come by the earlier train he wanted me to take you down to see it. It’s too late now. Basil’s in the garden: he’s been very naughty. He will play tennis against the side of the house—oh, and he’s broken a window!”

“Has he, the scoundrel! We must see about that. What else has happened?”

"Nothing. But Mummy's got a headache and is lying down. She said would you go and see her directly you came in."

The Blundells' house was not a big one, but it was big enough for their simple needs. Detached, it stood in a pleasant garden of about the third of an acre. It had its own tennis lawn and its own acacia tree: it was in essentials exactly like thousands of other residences around London. Mary Blundell worked in the garden herself with unsparing energy, her husband helping her with his ignorant counsel. As long as there were plenty of cheerful flowers he was quite content to let his wife do all the work. Two of the children were old enough to play lawn tennis in a kind of way. Vivian was the first; her brother, Richard, was to be ten before Christmas; Basil, the youngest, was just seven. Vivian had a daily governess who taught her very little; Dickie was at a preparatory day school; Basil went through a farce of lessons and could write and read. The real interests of the house were all within its four walls. Gerard Blundell was not nowadays impervious to ideas, but he thought of very little else than his work, his home, and his children. With his marriage, achieved immediately he had acquired his partnership, he had become domestic, and had remained so. The suggestion that he had ceased to take proper notice of the things of the world would have angered him. He still kept up his interest in painting, and was not entirely unsympathetic to its new developments. Also he read, or thought he read, the weekly reviews. Mary Blundell was not the kind of woman to stimu-

late ideas. Very little his junior, she had embraced matrimony as the be-all and end-all of her life. Her husband, her house and her children, her servants and her garden were what really occupied her thoughts. She could have done without friends. She was happiest when the currents of the world flowed round and past her home. She was placid but sometimes a little peevish and exigent. Without being at all vain, she very much resented the coming of age. Indeed, it was this trouble which had given her the headache Vivian had spoken of. After lunch she had gone to her room to get ready to go out. The blinds had remained undrawn, and as she combed back her hair the sun fell full on her face. She looked at her skin and at the lines round her eyes. It was horrible that she should be growing old. Her husband might come to care for her less. Already she fancied now and again that he preferred Vivian's company to hers. She had sat down before the glass and pondered her troubles until she had grown very sorry for herself. Tears had stolen into her eyes and had coursed down her cheeks. She had drawn the blinds and locked the door, and had then telephoned to the kitchen that she had a headache, that she was not to be disturbed, and that Mr Blundell was to come to her directly he came in. Then she had lain down on her bed and had fallen asleep. It was true that she was growing older, but her other troubles were all purely fanciful.

Gerard went at once to his wife's room, to the room that he shared with her. She was still asleep and he

had to wake her with his knocking before he could gain admittance. She had forgotten the sorrows that had kept her indoors; her headache was gone. But she looked a little dishevelled, tumbled, certainly not at her best.

"Why, Mary, you've got a headache again. I'm so sorry; and I'd thought we should have time for a little tennis before dinner. You lie down and I'll go and play with Vivian, or we'll walk down to meet Dickie. Do rest anyhow, because I have a lot to talk to you about after the children have gone to bed."

"No, talk to me now. My headache has quite gone, and if it's something annoying it will be a good thing to get it over."

"It is rather annoying, but it isn't serious. What gave you your headache, dear?"

"Basil and the servants. You'll have to deal with that boy, Gerard. He's getting beyond me. He doesn't pay any attention to what I say. I don't think you back me up enough. I have told him again and again that he must not play ball against the side of the house—and now he's broken a window."

"I know—Vivian told me. It doesn't matter much. A window's soon mended. But which one is it?"

"It's the one over your desk."

Gerard's face darkened. It pleased him less well that something of his own should be touched.

"Wait a moment, and I'll go down and settle with him." And he was gone, to send the offending child incontinently to bed. Why, in the name of patience, should he be so worried? Here he came home from his

work tired out and he had promptly to cope with one difficulty and another. Why couldn't Mary settle these little things herself? Now he would have to hear about some petty delinquencies of the maids, and then, instead of getting out with Vivian, he'd have to sit and talk over the doctor's opinion and to discuss the question of going abroad.

"Well, Mary, and what have the maids been doing this time?"

"I'll tell you afterwards. I want to know now what this annoying thing is that you have to talk to me about."

"Oh, Mary, do let us put that off till after dinner. It's not so bad that it can't wait."

"That's just like you, Gerard. Yes, of course I'm anxious—I always am when there's something happening I don't know all about. You are so inconsiderate."

"Very well." Gerard saw that it was no use attempting to put off his news. Although she had known of his little aches and pains and that he had not been feeling quite himself, he had kept from his wife the fact that he was going to consult a specialist. He had not been exactly frightened at what he might hear, but—— Well, he had always been in such good health, the whole system of his body had worked so well towards its ordained end, that the mere idea of having to take a serious opinion had carried with it a vague disquiet. He told her the bare outline of what he had heard and of his partners' opinion in as few words as possible. "The worst of it is that it'll prevent my going to Bude with you all. I shall miss that—

and you'll be sorry too, won't you, dear? If I'm to go to Aix at once don't you think you'd better go to Cornwall now instead of at the beginning of August? The rooms are sure to be vacant. Humphries will let Dickie off, of course. He'll only miss six weeks of term. That won't do him any harm at his age—— Why, what's the matter, Mary?" He jumped up and went over to the side of her chair, bent down and rubbed his cheek against hers. "Crying! What for? On my word of honour there's nothing to be frightened about. Dr Arbuthnot said that if I took a cure now and was reasonably careful about exercise I'd get rid of the gout once and for all. Please don't cry, darling. Tell me; what is it?" He caressed her hair with his hands and felt a beast—and felt also in the back of his mind a little impatient. The day was so beautiful, and here he was cooped up inside the house discussing something that was already settled—and oh! how he hated scenes.

"It isn't that I'm frightened, Jerry. But you've never done a thing like that before. You never kept anything back from me. Why didn't you tell me you were going to the doctor? How can I know now that you are not making the best of it, that there isn't something else? If you were ill what would happen to me and the children? You treat it all so lightly."

Gerard did his best to reassure her, and succeeded. The tears that irritated him so much ceased to flow.

But Mary was not satisfied. "When will you go?"

"The day after to-morrow, I think, dear, if you can get me off so soon. The sooner the better from the office point of view."

BITTERSWEET

"Of course; but you might think of me a little. We are dining on Monday with the Brett Joneses. I shall have to write to them. . . . And there are a lot of other things. Still, you'd better go. Won't it cost a great deal, though? I thought those places were so expensive. Aix-les-Bains is, anyway. Why couldn't he send you to a smaller, quieter place? Uncle Harry went to Contrexéville."

"I don't know, dear. He said Aix-les-Bains, and I suppose I'd better take his advice. He'd have said Contrexéville if he'd thought it would have been as good, no doubt."

Mary shook her head. "*I* don't think so. These doctors are all in the pay of the foreign watering-places. They send you to the one they've got the best arrangements with. But I wish you'd ask him if Contrexéville won't do as well. It would cost much less."

"No, I won't do that, Mary. I shouldn't have the cheek. Besides, he's writing to the Aix doctor about me to-night. I can't alter it now. We must just make the best of it. But I heard Dickie come in. Let me go out now; I want one set with him. There's time before dressing. Cheer up, sweetheart. We'll be happy as grigs when August comes. *I* don't like the idea of going to Aix, I can tell you. But the six weeks will soon be over. Now give me a kiss and I'll go down to the children."

"The children—the children, they're all you think of nowadays." But Mary spoke without apparent bitterness as she kissed her husband.

And for his part, Gerard thought that he had got through rather easily.

CHAPTER III

THE Savoy Express swung round the bend at the foot of Lac du Bourget, and Gerard, watching the beauty of mountain and lake unfold itself before his eyes, drew his breath in wonder. For the moment, that he was alone was the one flaw in his pleasure. If only Mary could have shared these impressions with him, or if he could have pointed out each fresh interest to Vivian his child!

Later, in Aix itself, as he unpacked in the gathering twilight and arranged his things for his three weeks of solitude, he felt unhappy, almost abandoned. As far as he knew he had neither friend nor acquaintance in the place. Mary's miniature he had put on the night table at the side of the bed, flanked by a copy of "Round the Corner" which he had tried to read in the train, and with which he had found himself out of patience; on the mantelpiece was a folding case containing the photographs of his three children and the leather-covered travelling-clock that his wife had given him at Charing Cross just before he had started: by its side were other books, books that he was always intending to read or to read again—"Tom Jones," the first two

volumes of Bury's Gibbon, "The Way of All Flesh," "The Varieties of Religious Experience," "Sandra Belloni," "The House of Souls," a play of Shakespeare, and a volume of Shelley's early poems. He looked at them and smiled in doubt of whether even here, where he would have no serious distractions, he should ever master their contents. All of them had at one time or another been on fruitless journeys with him. For some reason he had read so much less since he had come down from Oxford. But here—well, here he would have nothing to do but read. The cure wouldn't make for exercise. His friends had told him that, at first at least, he would find it depressing, lowering. And already indeed the mere facts of being here with no one to talk to, of the night falling, of being cut off from his interests, from his work, from his home, of having to follow a strange new routine, clouded his spirit. He felt that had he the courage he would return to London incontinently—that very night, indeed: yes, there was a train; he had looked—and that he would tell Dr Arbuthnot that he was sure the cure was worse than the disease and that he'd get better in Pall Mall and Wimbledon with the help of his own energy rather than spend twenty-one days in so alien, so remote a world.

Nor did a further investigation of the building in which he was to live his next three weeks do anything to cheer him. It was so early in the season that few of its usual English visitors had arrived. The ornate dining-room of the hotel had a chill, damp air; the half-dozen people who were already at dinner when he came down looked at him with apparent suspicion,

seemed to resent the fact that he was late. The head waiter struck him as a particularly unpleasant specimen of his German type. No, it was to be regretted that Monsieur couldn't have the little table by the window. Oh yes, certainly he could sit there to-night, but it was engaged for the morrow by old clients of the hotel.

Gerard chose another table, against the wall and removed as far as possible from the tables that were already occupied. He remembered that after to-night he would have to follow a strict diet. Certainly there was nothing on the menu of the hotel dinner that would help to make of it a last feast. Perhaps, he thought to himself, he had been a fool not to go out on this his first night in the place to one or other of the ambitious restaurants that he knew Aix could boast. He might then have felt less homesick. He wondered whether he would not after all have been wiser if he had brought Mary with him. But no, Mary would not have liked it; and even if she had, even if she could have reconciled herself to the expense, there would have been the difficulty about the children. Her mother could no doubt have been induced, would perhaps have been glad, to come and look after them, but—well, both he and Mary were in complete agreement that within limits the less the children saw of their grandmother the better: she spoiled them. And so no doubt it was all for the best that he had come away by himself. Twenty-two days and nights would pass, even if they passed slowly, and Aix, though it was the beginning of the season, had surely some gaieties with which to amuse its visitors. But he wouldn't look for them

to-night. The journey from Paris had tired him; he would go to bed and sleep. The physician to whom Dr Arbuthnot had commended him was to call betimes in the morning. Gerard had warned him of his imminent arrival, and had found a note waiting in the hotel. He had been told to stop in bed till Docteur Ribot came about nine o'clock—a stupid instruction, he thought, suggesting that he was actually ill and in need of great care rather than a little run-down and requiring merely a brief and gentle treatment.

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Monsieur le Docteur Ribot took no more serious view of Gerard Blundell's case than Dr Arbuthnot had done, but he subjected him to a much more searching examination, pounding and sounding him, investigating organ after organ, till his patient, not generally possessed of an intolerant spirit, wished him and Aix and all their works at the bottom of the lake.

"There is not very much the matter with you, Monsieur Blundell—nothing we can't put right in two or three weeks' treatment. When you've done what I tell you for a while and have had three weeks' rest on top of it—well, you'll be able to go home to your work and, with luck, not be troubled again for years."

"Two or three weeks, Monsieur? May I hope that two will do?"

Docteur Ribot smiled. "No, I'm afraid not: that was my manner of speaking. You'll be here for three weeks from to-day—for you'll begin your cure at once."

"But the after-cure—is that absolutely necessary?"

"I think it will be. If you go straight back to London

and your ordinary life from Aix you'll undo half the good that I'm going to do you. No, I shall send you somewhere or other, no doubt, and you'll finish the cure off properly—but we needn't bother about that now. Give me some notepaper, if you please: I will write you some prescriptions, and I'll put down exactly how you are to arrange your time."

The instructions, when Gerard came to read them, didn't seem so terrible. To-day he was to go to the bath-house at eleven, but ordinarily he was to be up at six-thirty to be carried down to his bath by porters whom Docteur Ribot promised he would provide; there he was to be massaged and punmelled and douched, and he was to be carried back to bed, where he was to stop till hard on lunch-time, sleeping the while if he found it possible. "I can always sleep," Gerard interpolated. His diet was to be very restricted, and he was to be prepared to feel very tired, weary, played out. "But that will pass if you do exactly what I tell you. Above all, try not to be bored. I needn't say that I don't want you to stop up till what you English call the small hours playing baccarat at the Grand Cercle, but there is no reason why you shouldn't amuse yourself reasonably in the evening. Go to the theatre; listen to the music. Don't go to bed too late, and take all the fresh air you can. I shall see you again to-morrow at about this time."

Left alone, Gerard turned over in bed and looked out of the windows at the hard line made by the mountains against the blue sky. It was a beautiful place; he did not see why he should not pass the time

BITTERSWEET

pleasantly enough even though he was alone. For the moment all he had to do was to wait for the porters to come and fetch him. He would sit up in bed and write to Mary to supplement, with a description of what Docteur Ribot had said, the brief note telling her of his arrival that he had sent over night. And then he wrote to Vivian, a long rambling letter describing the Channel-crossing, his night in Paris, the odd people in the train, the lake and the mountains, and how curious it was to be waiting for someone to carry him through the streets to his bath. . . . The second letter was a far more interesting one than the first: it was written with less effort and with more pleasure; he knew that Vivian would understand all that he had to tell her, that she would misapprehend nothing. With Mary, now, it had been different. He had had to pick and choose his words, to ask himself what effect each intended sentence would have on her mind before he could trust himself to write it down. It was not that she would be unreasonable, but her very love for him and his love for her had built up during these years of living together a certain unacknowledged restraint. He had been away from her hardly at all since they were married, certainly never for more than a few days—it was not experience but intuition that told him that his intelligence must not sleep when he wrote to her.

CHAPTER IV

HIS first day at Aix left Gerard with a sense of agreeable boredom. The sunshine of the morning, when he was in bed, had given place to a gentle rain in the afternoon, when, having had his first experience of a bath and its attendant manipulations of his unaccustomed body, and having eaten the uninteresting meal which Docteur Ribot had ordered, he was at liberty to walk about and explore. He could see that the place had possibilities, but for the moment at least it was, under grey skies, dull rather than gay, a resort of invalids rather than the haunt of fashion. He hoped that the next few days would liven things up. After all, one came to Aix in preference to a dozen other and less known cures because it was smart, cheerful, and because lots of people who had nothing whatever the matter with them had given it the reputation of an inland Monte Carlo, a continually amusing Vanity Fair. He was frank enough with himself to know that his reason for not at once acceding to Mary's suggestion that he should try to get Dr Arbuthnot's permission to go to Contrexéville instead of to Aix was that as he was to be alone he

would be less dull in a town which laid itself out to entertain as well as to cure, and in which he could, within the limits imposed by the treatment, lead what to him would be an entirely new kind of life, surrounded by amused and amusing crowds doing things which were never done in England, in a way which to an English observer would be a constant source of distraction. And now apparently, judging by to-day's experience, the weather, and the visitors to his hotel, he was by no means to get what he had bargained for: he might almost as well have gone to Droitwich or to Bath.

Still, there was something rather pleasant and idle about the programme that had been laid down for him. To have no other duties than the six-thirty visit to his bath., the nine o'clock visit of his physician, and the necessity of catching the evening post to *England*—for he would write to his wife every day—meant that he could be as lazy as he chose, that he could sleep all day in his room or when the sun came, in the garden of the hotel; that he could read or pretend to read; and that when the whim seized him he could go about and see the neighbourhood, visit Annecy and Chambéry, and even go as far afield as Grenoble and the Grande Chartreuse. He need not and would not bother about the other people in the hotel. "Is this your first visit to Aix?" an Englishman, with an untidy, nonconformist beard, had sidled up to him and asked as, just before going up to dress for dinner, Gerard had perched himself for a moment on the balcony rail and looked out over the tennis-courts to the hills

beyond. "Taking the cure, I suppose? So am I. My sixth year. It's a change after Sheffield, but it's a bit lonely till one makes friends. I'll show you a few things if you like—you're alone, aren't you? Personally, I always do exactly what my doctor tells me. Who do you go to? Ribot—oh! well, I don't know anything about him, but I'm sure you'd be wise to change. Everyone says that Docteur Vignon is the best here. Let me speak to him about you. Shall I?"

Gerard explained politely that he had come to Aix on the advice of his own English doctor and that he had been told to place himself under Docteur Ribot, and that, even if he wanted it, he did not quite see how a change could be effected. Mr Champion—for that was the name of the untidy nonconformist—was not to be so easily rebuffed. "That's a pity. The cure here can do a lot of harm if your man doesn't understand you—and there are as many stupid doctors in Aix as in England, and the fools in London and the fools here play into one another's hands. I hope you'll be all right though. I don't suppose you want to go down there much at night-time"—and he waved his hand in the direction of the two casinos; "I went once, and I didn't like it. No, sir, it astonishes me the way the French go on and the things they allow—but no matter: one needn't share in it. And this hotel's good enough for me in the evening. Of course, it's empty now; it'll be crowded in a fortnight. They play bridge a lot. I don't. I play patience. And the music isn't bad sometimes. There's a girl here now with her mother—Goddard their name is: I'll introduce you—

who sings rather well. Between you and me and the doorpost I think she's here to get married. It's time, although she isn't bad-looking." He looked Gerard up and down. "You'll suit them, I should think. They'll know all about you before you've been in the place three days, and then you'll have to look out for yourself. They were here last year, and the year before, so I know them pretty well. Nice, though. Shall we go somewhere together to-morrow afternoon?—it'll be fine, you see. No. Perhaps you're right. At the beginning of the cure it's best to be quiet. But I'll be glad to do something with you any day you like. My room's near yours--number forty-three. See you to-night, too."

Devoutly hoping that it was the fact that he had only just arrived, and that Mr Champion had so far found few other visitors on whom to exercise his geniality, which explained this unwelcome onslaught, Gerard went up to his room and dressed at his leisure. His troublesome friend greeted him when he entered the restaurant, and looked as if he was going to ask him to share his table, and Gerard had hurriedly to search his mind for a plausible, a not so obvious, excuse; but Mr Champion apparently thought better of it, very likely thought that it would be a pity to compromise himself too deeply before he saw what other visitors the next few days might produce. Gerard had gone to his own place and had read and had eaten, and when his dinner was at an end had looked into the drawing-room, had identified without interest or pleasure Miss Goddard and her mother, and had gone upstairs and to bed. If he was to be called at half-past six it would do him no harm to be asleep by ten.

Gerard sank into slumber thinking pleasantly of the fact that one day out of twenty-one had passed, and believing vaguely that since, as far as he had seen, the atmosphere of Aix was the reverse of exhilarating and gay, he would be able to sleep through the greater part of his cure. He had always been able to sleep. While other men of his time sat on into the small hours, he had, as soon as ten o'clock was past, always fidgeted for his bed. He and Mary, save when some form of Wimbledon gaiety or a visit to town had kept them up, were in the habit of finishing their day, he closing his book, she folding her knitting or her sewing, at ten. And he would sleep till he was called. . . . On this second night at Aix, however, he woke while it was still dark. Turning on his light, he found that it still wanted four hours to the time when he would have to rise. He composed himself to sleep again, but sleep would not come. He lay there wondering what had happened to him. He felt neither ill nor tired nor energetic. Knowing nothing by experience of insomnia, he fancied that something must have gone wrong, or that he must have been wakened by some noise that his senses did not remember. Whatever it was managed to keep him awake, just awake, uncomfortably on the wrong side of consciousness. The curtains covered the windows inadequately; soon they were outlined by the gathering dawn; then the sun crept round their edges. After a while he gave up the struggle, and taking up his book read till he was called, consoling himself with the thought that no doubt the sudden change to a mountain atmosphere was responsible for this aberration,

and that it was not likely to be repeated. Anyhow, it was a fine day.

When he came back from his bath and was once more in bed, his breakfast was brought to him, and immediately afterwards his letters and the London papers. A letter from his wife and a letter from Vivian said nothing that was of the slightest interest. They missed him—of course. There was no word from Pall Mall: his partners had assured him that not even a serious crisis in the firm's affairs would make them break in on his cure. He would have welcomed any news. He wondered how certain negotiations, not very important but still interesting in their way, which he had initiated and which Pontifex had promised to carry through, were progressing. Well, he would have to wonder. And the newspapers were no more amusing than his letters. . . . After a while he fell asleep, and woke unrefreshed and very bored with life at half-past eleven. The fine day had gone to pieces again.

Lunch over he walked down to the Grand Cercle and took out a subscription for a month, looked at the dull papers that were so pretentiously arranged in the reading-room, and ascertained that before he could go into the *cercle privé* he must produce his passport. He could do that to-night, when he would hear the concert. Dinner was the same uninspired meal, and he could hardly put his hand on his heart and say that the concert had given him pleasure. He was one of those unfortunate people who care only for bad or indifferent music or for good music which had grown familiar. The entertainment, however, served one good purpose: it kept him out of bed till close on midnight.

But that night he slept no better and was awake almost as soon as it was light. Docteur Ribot, to whom he complained in the morning, said that it was often so at the beginning of the cure, that he must expect it, and that it would be better to put up with it. "Of course, if it goes on I can give you a sleeping draught, but I don't want to—no, better not, better not," and he went away leaving Gerard with the impression that he didn't care a damn whether his patient slept or not, that perhaps after all his case was misunderstood and the so-called cure would do him more harm than good.

"I can't stand this for another nineteen days. I shall go mad," he said to himself.

CHAPTER V

WISER counsels prevailed. Gerard remembered he had been warned that the first days of his cure would be very depressing, dull, relaxing. They certainly were. Of course it was possible that Docteur Ribot was treating him wrongly; it was possible that he was only being kept at Aix and tied down to this dull routine in order that he might add to the physician's income. But he had the sense to know that both these things were unlikely. He would look even a greater fool than he felt if he went back to England without giving Aix and its doctors a chance. Mary would have the opportunity of her life: she would never forget that he had chucked away all that money for nothing. And his partners. . . . No, he would have to stick it out. Perhaps if he wasn't so damnably unsocial he might get some distraction out of Champion, out of Mrs Goddard, and out of her daughter with her fresh, warm skin, her firm neck, and her vacuous, rather chinless face. But there he was again—seeing quite ordinary people in terms of aversion. How could he expect to enjoy himself? Anyhow, it was too late now. He had snubbed Champion, and he had no reason for supposing

that the other guests, those he had seen anyhow, were either amusing or intelligent. Still, even with these *handicaps that he had made for himself with his intolerance and his temperment, he would be a fool indeed if he could not entertain himself, if he could not make life tolerable, for nineteen days. It was not as if he didn't like walking, as if he didn't appreciate scenery. Why, people came to Aix for its beauty, and they came, too, because of its gaiety.*

That afternoon Gerard walked under a grey sky the whole straight length of the road to Viviers and back, and found it dull, dull and tiring. He had taken no real exercise for days, and going back to his room he felt so sleepy that he enjoyed half an hour's nap before dinner . . . but he didn't enjoy waking up; and when later on he went again to the concert he was in no proper mood to take pleasure even in the music that he knew. Truth was that he could not support these solitary hours; he felt more than he realised the need of the society he relied on, the absence of conversation, of cheerful chatter: he was not used to being alone. If Mary had been with him or one of his partners or one of the friends of his Oxford days he would have been amused with watching the stupid game of *boule* and the stupid dull people losing their francs. Alone, the thing had no savour, no spirit. It appeared to him, who had seen no public gambling and had gambled hardly at all in private, an easy game to win money at; he even went to the length of adventuring and losing a few francs with a sense of sin, with discomfort and with the knowledge that he had no margin for such extravagances. Then,

paying a subscription that it seemed ridiculous that he should pay, and yet salving his conscience with the reflection that after all he must see what there was to see, and that he must provide himself with some means of diversion in these later hours of the evening when it was hopeless to attempt to sleep, he went into the *salons privés* of the Cercle and looked at, without at all understanding, the baccarat. These elderly men with impassive faces whom he supposed to be "taking the bank" and who would call out numbers and show their cards as if the whole thing was rather a bore than otherwise; a group of young Englishmen who laughed too much when they put money on the table and much too much when fate enabled them to take it off again; a fat, tall American whose clothes were too good, whose moustache was too carefully arranged, who looked the embodiment of false geniality, and who was evidently somebody of importance; the few ladies of a kind to which he wasn't accustomed, dressed with an exquisite skill that he had never seen in London, and whose lack of virtue he scented rather than suspected—all these people seemed to be like actors in a play, and, in a haze of tobacco smoke, hardly real. He watched thousands of francs change hands, but without excitement, without interest. Certainly his little losses at the smaller game outside had killed all temptation to try his luck again. Besides, the stakes ran higher here. And he remembered that Pontifex had lost a lot of money in this very place. Well, he wouldn't do that.

He looked at his watch; it was already one o'clock. It would be nearly two before he would get to bed.

Surely to-night he'd sleep. But he felt dull rather than tired.

Getting his coat and hat, Gerard stood for a moment at the gate of the Grand Cercle and looked about him. There was a little moon and a heavy bank of clouds. The sky promised rain. The porter wanted to call him a carriage but, although he had no umbrella, he refused. In the first place, he wished to walk; and in the second, the carriage would cost more than he would like to spend. His hotel was not twenty minutes away. The rain would keep off surely. He would chance it.

Three minutes from the door of the Casino the first drops fell. Gerard turned up his coat collar and hoped that they would come to nothing. Then, with the suddenness that Aix knows, the rain came down; he had hardly time to find shelter under the glass awning of a café before the street was streaming with water, the gutters running little torrents. And now there were no cabs to be seen, and the moon was eclipsed: it looked as if it might rain for hours. "Hell!" he said to himself, and wondered how long his patience would allow him to stand there being splashed with the water falling in sheets from the edge of the screen. There was no refuge in the café. It was closed tight: he could just see through the doors chairs and tables piled one on top of another. Even in the little while it would take him to get back to the Casino he would get wet through. No, that wasn't to be attempted. Perhaps directly an empty carriage might come.

Ten minutes passed and no cabman had offered to drive him home. He was just making up his angry mind

that he had no choice but to sacrifice his coat, his dress suit, his shoes and his hat—and that would be the devil of a business: he had no others in Aix to fall back on—when at last a carriage did arrive at a door only a few paces from where he stood. Evidently it had come from the Grand Cercle. Gerard could see its passengers alight, protected one by one as they scurried into shelter by the huge umbrella of a *chasseur* who had sprung from nowhere. As the door opened he could hear music, and bright light shone across the wet pavement. He realised then that next to the café was a restaurant that he had noticed that very evening, a gay, coquette little place that he had thought of dining in one night. Now it was serving an even more useful purpose. He could take the carriage of these late revellers—and he whistled to the driver. His difficulties, however, were not to be so simply resolved. The Frenchman looked at him and grinned, lifting his half-open hand and waving it to and fro as if in deprecation of any more attempts at getting his attention. Gerard understood. The man had to wait for the fares who had just left him. And it was raining harder than ever.

But, after all, there was no need to get wet. Where these other people had gone he could go. Why a restaurant should be open at half-past one he didn't know, but he could go in and get a drink and a sandwich, and by the time he was ready to leave the rain might have stopped. He whistled again to the driver and held up a franc, shouting as he did so in the best French of which he was capable:

“Envoyez le chasseur là avec son ombrelle.”

The Frenchman either couldn't or wouldn't understand. Gerard had to shout explanations. At length the facts seemed to penetrate through the layers of waterproof with which the driver was enveloped, or perhaps the light shone on the franc that was being held up. "*Bien*," he cried, and flicked the door with his whip. The *chasseur* appeared again, and, after a word with his friend, took in the situation and came to Gerard's rescue. His huge umbrella was big enough to shelter them both.

CHAPTER VI

AS a compliment to its English clients the restaurant which Gerard had entered is called the Piccadilly. Its proprietor is an Italian, its motto *Fay ce que voudras*, its reputation—well, it is a place to which, after winning considerable sums in the Casino or after losing everything but a louis or two, the gambler resorts to drink champagne, to dance, to make perhaps the acquaintance of a pretty woman to whom his hard work at the green tables had so far prevented his paying attention. Ladies often insist on being taken to it out of curiosity or a sense of adventure. Generally they find it dull.

And dull, certainly, it was to-night, dull and empty.

As Gerard entered he was for a moment dazzled by the light. Also he had, from the very minute that a tumbled and obsequious cloak-room attendant insisted, in spite of his protests, on taking his coat and hat, a sense that he was adventuring in what was for him a new and in some way unseemly world. Not that he knew anything of the place that need give him pause. He had heard often enough of night restaurants in Paris and had read of them, but it never occurred to him that he

would find one here in Aix, and even if it had, he would, no doubt, quite carelessly, have taken shelter. His life had been a simple one. Even a wine merchant can remain unspotted from the world. It was literally true that Mary was the first woman Gerard had ever loved. He had flirted at his college balls at Oxford, but nothing had come of his little affairs; nothing was intended to come of them. A certain shyness, the shrinking of his spirit, had kept him from experience.

The guests who had preceded Gerard into the Piccadilly had, he saw at once, the place to themselves. They were two men and a woman—all three of them people he had seen an hour before. They were sitting in a corner under a balcony screened from the rest of the hall by a couple of marble pillars. It was a chamber not without some architectural charm, even with some dignity. All around were small tables prepared for visitors whom perhaps the bad weather had kept away, and at one end was an orchestra that even Gerard recognised as beyond calculation bad. It was working hard playing rag-time, each musician a law unto himself, noisy but perfunctory. But not the three guests, not the empty tables, not the proprietor with his sleek hands and false smile, not the turbulent orchestra held Gerard's attention: what mostly he saw were the half dozen costumed dancers who, just for four visitors, were circling the room. Two were men, a youth with oiled yellow hair and a dirty Spaniard, the rest women, of an age uncertain as they moved, but graceful, skilful. . . .

Gerard was interrupted in his watching of the scene by Monsieur Piaci, the proprietor, who insisted that his

guest must have a good table and who, misinterpreting his hesitation and fearing to lose his fish, began to explain that it was still early, that directly there would be plenty of other visitors, that it would be very gay. He himself pressed the wine list into Gerard's hand and waited for his order.

"Oh, give me a whiskey-and-soda and a sandwich of some sort."

"Pardon, Monsieur, but we only serve wine for supper. We have to make a rule: the expenses are so heavy."

Half inclined to get up and go away, but remembering the rain and disliking to appear mean, Gerard opened the list and almost at random asked for half a bottle of the first Moselle that he recognised, and that he also recognised was priced at about four times its proper restaurant value.

"I am sorry, Monsieur, but we have only bottles. I will bring Monsieur a bottle—and a tongue sandwich,"—and he was gone before any remonstrance, or any request for a half bottle of something else, could reach his ears.

"Well, it's lucky that I've got a couple of louis in my pocket," Gerard said, feeling to be sure that he had made no mistake. "Apparently I'm to pay for my shelter and my experience. Eighteen francs for a bottle of Piesporter of no stated year is about the limit. I won't come here again, that's certain." He turned to look at the dancers.

Already the spring had gone out of their movements. At the moment that guests had arrived they had begun to dance, but the hour or so that they had had to wait, dull

and unoccupied, had damped their fire. Now slowly the measure dropped to nothing, like one of those toy pigs or chickens which children inflate and then allow to shrink and fade till they fall to the ground. But Gerard had time to see that their dancing was no evasion. Even the two men could dance, with a nervous, almost epileptic energy which their partners did their best to equal. The third couple interested him most. A young girl, looking perhaps nineteen, whose laughing yellow curls shook above her shoulders, and whose blue eyes found and held his with impertinent curiosity, was dancing with another whose age was perhaps a year or two more, a girl of a different type, serious, almost tragic faced. The music stopped; the two who were at the other end of the hall separated, and the one whom Gerard took to be the younger trotted lightly in her very short tartan skirts to his table and sat herself down with no more by-your-leave than "Oh, I'm thirsty: quick, give me something to drink. You will let me sit here, won't you?"

Whether he blushed or not Gerard could not have told. He was extremely surprised and profoundly embarrassed. Here was a situation for which neither by experience nor by taste was he equipped. What should one do in such a position? He could hardly bring himself to send the young woman away, but he could with difficulty reconcile himself to her remaining where she was, at his table, at his table where anyone might see her and misunderstand. Luckily there was practically nobody in the place. He supposed he would have to put up with her with as good a grace, with as much politeness,

as he was capable of. He poured out and gave her a glass of his Moselle. She made an ugly face.

"I don't much like that wine. However, it'll do. And now something to eat, please."

The waiter coming at that moment with the sandwich, Gerard gave it to her and ordered another for himself.

And now he felt that he would be justified in looking at his guest, from whom, in his shyness and ignorance of the right way to behave, he had been averting his gaze.

More than nineteen, he thought to himself, but not very much more; that tangle of curls was real, and she didn't look vicious or stained, but gay and young-hearted, even simple. He could see that her skin was powder-coated: especially now did it show when her forehead was beaded with sweat; but her smile was natural and candid. The little tell-tale lines around her eyes were almost alone in suggesting that experience was here as well as youth, knowledge as well as charm. Her thin shoulders, covered discreetly with a white blouse, were finely drawn and well proportioned. She looked in good health. And what could he say to her? She talked English evidently, was English or American perhaps. But how was he to interest her for the few minutes that she would remain his guest? He did owe her some politeness, he felt.

The girl broke the silence:

"You don't look very cheerful. Perhaps you have been losing money? You'd have done better to have come here and given it to us. However, it's not too

late." She paused, and Gerard asked her if she was English or American.

"Neither; French—Parisian. I've worked in America, though; danced there a whole year, in New York and all over—with my sister: there she is," and she pointed out a girl who was talking to the people at the only other occupied table. "She's older than I am—a year older. We were called 'The Two Forget-me-nots' in America, and we had lots of success. Why didn't we stop there? Oh, we wanted to come home and see the folks. Besides, I didn't like the travelling, and we can make more money in Paris. Oh no, we don't get paid anything here, but people pay us to dance with them. You'll dance directly. And for sitting at their table too. But this year everything's rotten so far. The season hasn't begun, of course. You're about the only boy I've seen—and I've been here three days."

Gerard winced at being called a "boy": it reminded him of his undergraduate days and foolish gossip with barmaids. He would have liked to have told his companion that people who knew how to behave didn't talk of "boys," and indeed the sentence was on the tip of his tongue; but instead he asked her name:

"Oh, Sybil—Sybil Murray. My sister's called Claire. She'll come over directly. She likes English boys," and she looked round; and then with "Pardon, a minute," she ran off to speak to her sister, leaving Gerard in considerable comfort of mind. One young woman of this strange species he might be able to manage—but two; no! And perhaps they'd want more wine—he looked at the half-full bottle that remained—and more

to eat ; and she had spoken of people paying her for sitting at their table. Two louis and three or four francs were all that he had about him. He might spare her five francs. But he had a doubt whether that would satisfy her. Well, he must get out of it as quick as ever he could. It was an experience any way, even though a costly one. Exactly what did the girl expect of him in the way of money and attention ? And how pretty she was, and how graceful. He had watched her little feet and slim ankles tripping across the room. It was a shame that she should be in a place like this.

Minutes passed, and Gerard began, not without some disappointment of spirit, to think it likely that he was to be left alone, that his new friend had tried him and had found him wanting. She had disappeared now. He couldn't help being sorry. He had liked her ; had been interested in her. There was, he felt sure, more in her than the ordinary visitor to such a place would realise. Her prettiness, her grace, were not all she had. He wondered how much of simplicity, how much that was real, was still left in her character. He wished she had come back, because he would have liked to talk to her, to learn more about her. No, he didn't think he could reclaim her. For one thing, it wasn't his business—he could not afford in his position to start on any enterprise of that kind ; for another, perhaps she didn't need reclaiming—there might be nothing to reclaim her from. All the same—well, where could such a life lead ? He wished she had come back. As things were he wasn't likely to see her again. He wouldn't be coming to the

Piccadilly a second time. . . . He sipped his poor wine meditatively. It was a beastly world, he reflected. Perhaps it had stopped raining and he could go home. He supposed he could send the waiter to see.

But as he looked round for someone to despatch on this quest Sybil Murray reappeared. She was not alone : her arm was round the waist of the girl with whom lately he had seen her dancing. Together they crossed the hall to his table, his friend smiling, her companion with a face not smiling at all, but impassive, still : she seemed as she approached to examine him impersonally, as if he were an object of a kind to which she was not very used but which might be worth investigation. Gerard felt his eyes drawn to hers. He saw that they not only looked but were serious. He was, however, allowed little time.

"I tell my friend there is room for her on your table. There is, isn't there? You know we're rather dull to-night. We want cheering up. You must give us some wine."

Gerard did not rise. He had a feeling that it would not be the right thing to do. He smiled a welcome.

"I was afraid you weren't coming back, that you were going to neglect me. Of course there is room for your friend. But won't you introduce me?"—and then he could have bitten off his tongue. How could he, whose name Sybil Murray didn't know, be introduced? But he need have had no fear.

"This is Illona. She's not French. I don't know what she is. She's a good *camarade*. And she likes English boys, too."

The stranger girl held out her hand: "Enchanted, Monsieur, to know you. Yes, I talk English almost as well as Sybil does: I learnt—oh, years ago. No, not in America." And she sat down and fixed her gaze on him once more as if speculating on his character. Her eyes had a tolerant, comprehending look.

Gerard's first embarrassment had worn off. They seemed harmless, these two girls. He liked their being there. Why shouldn't he? He would not see them again; and, just now, poor souls, they were dull, and he was helping them pass the time. He was attracted by them too. He recognised that frankly. And they were so different from the women, the girls, he had known—and different from one another. Perhaps Sybil was the prettier, but the new girl was handsome and of a finer type. He looked at her and caught her eyes again. They were simply green, with brown radiations from the centre; her skin—was it made up at all? He knew too little to tell—was of ivory. It looked cool. There was a little flush of pale rose in her cheeks. Her mouth had no vice: it was regular, and not till later did he discover that it was best, far best, in repose; that when she smiled it lost a little of its charm, and that when she laughed, which she did hardly at all, it lost much. Brown hair she had, rippling and generous, falling over her shoulders and held at the neck by a clasp of tortoise-shell. Her hair and her simple dress, white and not decorated, of a length convenient for dancing, coming to just above her ankles, which were ribbon-strapped, gave her something of the air of a flapper. Certainly she didn't look Gallic, but she didn't look

English. Perhaps the word he wanted was "distinction." Surely she had distinction.

Suddenly she spoke: "We'll have some supper. And give me some wine, please—I'd rather have champagne."

Gerard remembered his two louis, and he felt that, even if he hadn't the usages of the place at his command, he must at least pretend to be no novice. It would never do to find himself without enough money to pay the bill. "I am very sorry, but I can't stop long enough for you to have supper—you shall have a sandwich like your friend, and as for wine, well, here is some Moselle. It costs about as much as champagne, and *I* can't drink champagne: I'm on a cure."

The girl's eyes clashed with his and sank. Her face clouded for a fraction of a second. "Very well: order me a sandwich; I wanted chicken. And I'll drink this wine, but it doesn't suit me." She seemed anxious to relapse again into silence, to be left alone. Sybil Murray began to talk. Had he been in Aix before? How long was he going to stay? Did he know Monte Carlo? Why had she never seen him anywhere? Or had she seen him at the Abbaye? Surely he danced. She would teach him. He ought to learn. Wasn't it dull in Aix? However, there were plenty of things to see. Boys often took her motoring. But there was nobody she knew here yet. It would be different directly.

Gerard looked at her and found himself wishing that he could offer to take her—and her friend, too, perhaps—on some motoring excursion. But it was out of the question. He knew he had better get up as quickly as he could and go away. The waiter was hovering over

the table, expectant of fresh commands. Gerard took his courage and asked for his bill. He must go—even if it were still raining. Better to sacrifice his clothes than to linger here. After all, he might meet these girls outside and it wouldn't do to feel bound to recognise and talk to them. He would surely have to, if he sat on now and learned more and more of their tastes and habits.

“What, are you going so soon? That is a pity. But you'll come to-morrow: it'll be gayer then; there will be more people.” It was his first acquaintance who was speaking. Gerard felt bound to answer her gently, politely:

“I must go, Mademoiselle; I'm on a cure. My doctor would be angry enough if he knew I was up as late as this. But I hope to see you both again.” Heaven help him for a liar! he thought.

The waiter brought him his bill. There was little change out of two louis. The tip deducted, there wasn't enough to give Sybil Murray the five francs he had destined for her. He felt very awkward, but what could he do? After all, she had come uncalled to his table, and so had her friend.

The girl Ilona looked up. “Haven't you a louis for each of us? It will be useful to-morrow.”

Gerard blushed and avoided her gaze. “I haven't got more than this change, Mademoiselle. I never intended coming here to-night, and so I brought no money. It was the rain that drove me in. I am very sorry.” Somehow it didn't seem odd or shameful that she should ask for a louis. It seemed natural. And her eyes, her face,

had changed not at all. They showed no regret at her failure.

"Very well, then. You'll come again to-morrow, and we'll have supper with you—but mind, no sandwiches. Then you'll owe us each two louis—one for each day. Au revoir, Monsieur."

Gerard would have stopped a few minutes longer. Now that his bill was paid and his retreat secure he felt more at ease. But he took the girl's words as his dismissal.

The rain had ceased. Stars powdered the sky where it showed between trees black or bright green in the light of the lamps. The air had the freshness of morning. As Gerard left the restaurant and took his things he gave the cloak-room attendant a couple of francs, the smallest coin he had. The man showed his teeth and smiled. He also looked to see this new client again. Surely he would return to-morrow. But Gerard walked home to his hotel with no idea of a second visit in his mind. Suddenly he had become very tired, very sleepy. To-morrow he would think of what he had been doing. Just now all that he wanted was to get to bed.

CHAPTER VII †

AT half-past six the next morning Gerard, when called for his bath, was fast asleep. He could have slept for hours longer, and only his respect for Docteur Ribot in particular, and for authority in general, prevented his sending the porters away, turning again to his pillow and letting, at least for a while, his cure go to the devil. But even though his rest had been cut short, he felt immeasurably better, fresher, than he had done on previous mornings. Carried through the busy, smiling, sparkling streets, he recalled all the incidents of the night, recalled them with a kind of pleased shame, making a little grimace to himself as he thought of what Wimbledon or Pall Mall would have said if they could have seen him at that restaurant table entertaining, or trying to entertain, those two pretty girls. Trying to entertain—yes, that was the worst of it. He had succeeded so ill: he knew so little of the way in which he should or in which he was expected to behave. They must have laughed at him as singularly simple and stupid. Perhaps he would see them again. Would he recognise them in any other than their dancing dresses? Certainly there would be

no harm in his looking out for them. He wished now he had been less cautious and had discovered something of how they passed their days. Anyhow, even if it were less expensive—and how much it had cost!—he wouldn't go back to the Piccadilly. It was not the kind of world in which he saw himself. And other people might see him, people whom he knew. One could never be sure. He did not find now that he regretted the money he had spent. He could save it in one way and another during the next weeks. The great result of his little dissipation was that he had broken the chain of his sleepless nights, and that he had had an entirely novel experience. After all, he was old enough to recognise what was not good for him, and it was surely an advantage to know how other people lived. And what an extraordinary life it was! All the time he was being bathed and douched and pummelled he thought of those two girls. Sybil was as slim and graceful as a little panther. He could picture her so clearly, her golden curls shaking as she danced, her slender legs intricately moving. Surely she was youth itself, a Bacchanal, an almost childish server in that curious temple dedicated to pleasure. Her companion he could recall less clearly, but he could see her eyes, strange, serious, questioning eyes. . . .

"You seem better this morning," Docteur Ribot remarked. "Your pulse is steadier and your eyes look clearer. Ah! It's because you've slept better? 'That's right'. You'll find you have no more difficulty, I expect."

In five minutes his patient was asleep again and hardly woke in time to dress for *déjeuner*.

That afternoon Aix was at its best.

Repelling with as polite a reason as he could summon to his aid a suggestion of Mr Champion's that they should go somewhere together, Gerard went in search of the lake. It was a pity that Aix had not been built on its very edge. He found it a dull walk but worth while, once he could see the mountains mirrored in the placid water. He would have taken a boat, but it was later than he thought. He might go back in the tram, but he preferred the exercise, and he wanted to have his tea in some place where he could see the world. He had not learned much of the town yet, and now for the first time he was beginning to enjoy himself, to have a zest for sight-seeing. He had a sense of well-being. If all his days were to be like this that was passing, then surely his visit would do him good, Dr Arbuthnot would be justified, and Mary, whom he still suspected of having no very clear mind as to the advantages of his journey, would have to confess that, even if Contrexéville would have been cheaper, Aix had done its appointed work.

But his tea was no great success. He had chosen the most crowded place he could find, and he looked about him in the hope of seeing someone whom he knew. Surely some friend, some acquaintance would be in the town—so he said to himself; but it was but a half-hearted attempt at self-deception: what he really looked for was a girl's figure. From a quarter-past four to a quarter-past five he sat over his infusion of hay and looked shyly at every new visitor. He recognised no one, and as for the girls he thought he might have seen—well, it was perhaps absurd to expect them to

haunt a place of this kind. At length, when he felt that his long stay was attracting attention, he strolled into the Place du Revard, sat on a bench, and searched for another hour every knot of people with anxious eyes. After a while he gave up hope and walked back to his hotel, but he made a detour that took him past the Piccadilly: it looked both discreet and attractive in the daylight, but it was too quiet: he saw now that it had not the air of expecting visitors to lunch or dinner. Its hour was in the night when every other place was closed. Well, in any case, he wouldn't visit it again.

Gerard that evening did not leave the hotel. After dinner Mr Champion came up and asked him if he didn't play picquet. They had to converse in broken moments for fear of disturbing Miss Goddard's songs. Gerard explained that he played cards hardly at all, and that picquet he knew nothing of. He hoped that the insistent Champion would single out some other victim; but there were too few visitors. Instead of going away, the bore sat down and began to talk about books. Had Gerard read Winston Churchill's latest? "Not our Winston Churchill, of course. You know they're not even related. Funny, isn't it? But perhaps you don't like reading. I do; I read a great deal. I've just finished——" and he named the last egregious work of an egregious novelist whom even The Haven, Acacia Road, had never welcomed.

Mr Champion continued: "As a matter of fact, I didn't suppose you cared for that sort of thing much. You've been out every night, and between you and me" —and here, while avoiding a leer, he succeeded in looking

ridiculously knowing—"you rather broke the record this morning. I'm a light sleeper and I heard you come home. I hope they haven't got you into their clutches down there. Goodbye to the cure if they have, I'm afraid."

Gerard knew that by "down there" Mr Champion meant to indicate the baccarat rooms, and he saw no reason for taking away this small foundation for harmless gossip. He smiled shyly and said nothing, and continued to say nothing for several minutes, with so much success that at last, during a pause in Miss Goddard's energies, his tormentor took himself off and he himself went to his bed.

To-night he found sleep quickly, but it was not yet midnight when some neighbour, going to his room—perhaps Mr Champion in mean revenge—woke him with the unnecessary noise of which visitors to hotels are so often guilty. And after that, sleep came not again till long after the sun had risen. He tossed to and fro, tried getting up and plunging his head into cold water, tried drinking cold water, tried walking up and down his room. Nothing availed. For a while he was almost tempted to switch on the light, to dress, and to go down to the Cercle—even to visit the Piccadilly. His resolution ought not to count against common sense, against the harm that it would do him if night after night he found sleep impossible. Perhaps it was the thought of Mr Champion that prevented him. Gerard was ashamed of his hesitation, but all the same he had no wish to have his going out at such an unusual hour commented on; besides, the night-porter would think it odd.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was no use. Gerard had felt so rotten all day that when the evening came he fled his hotel and haunted the concert and the gaming rooms of the Grand Cercle until an hour after midnight. He evaded through those hours the question of what he should do to finish his day, but in his heart of hearts he knew. And yet, even when he was at the gate of the Cercle, he went through the farce of looking at his watch and wondering whether if he went straight home he would be able to sleep. He was afraid not. At least, if he did go into the Piccadilly for a few minutes, he was this time sufficiently provided with money. He had seen to that before coming out. But even in that little action he had refused to be frank with himself. As he strode away he argued a little: after his experience of a couple of days ago surely he was more than justified in thinking that there was something sedative, something that affected his nerves favourably, in the atmosphere of the restaurant. Yes, he would just look in. He need not stop.

The menials at the door greeted him as an old habitué. Monsieur Piaci showed him to the same table. He

looked about him expectantly. There were more people to-night. For the moment no one was dancing. Sybil Murray he could not see, but her sister was at supper with a well set-up young Englishman to whom Gerard had never spoken but whom he had often noticed in London, the first person at Aix whom he realised having seen before. Illona was talking to the male dancer with the oiled, yellow hair, laughing, ragging apparently: she had turned round as he came in and had looked at him, but without any sign of recognition. Perhaps she was expecting someone. The idea did not please him. Indeed, he had thought of himself as arriving and of being greeted immediately by his two friends, who would come running to his table and would later on be reluctant to let him go. As it was, he had to sit down by himself, and had at once the feeling of being neglected, of being unpopular.

The orchestra struck up a waltz. Gerard lit a cigar—a very good cigar: cigars were one of the commodities in which Pontifex, Mathews and Blundell dealt—and refused to look at the gyrations of the dancers. He was dissatisfied. Things were not happening at all as he had planned. If he had not ordered wine and food he would have made some excuse to himself for going away. To distract his attention he began to read the wine card, an imposing and factitious document. He glanced up just in time to see Sybil Murray glide past in the arms of her sister's Englishman. She was an exquisite waltzer: he followed her with his eyes, and once as she turned she saw and recognised him with a little pout hardly indicative of pleasure or of welcome.

He was chagrined; his self-conceit was rather injured. His mood must have shown itself in his face.

"You look so cross that I hardly dare come on your table. What's the matter? Won't she look at you? Never mind; it's an old friend of hers, a very rich boy."

Gerard looked up, startled. It was Sybil's friend, Illona, who had spoken; she had come up quietly behind him, and now she held out her hand, frankly, to greet him, frankly and yet with that strange, serious, questioning gaze which he had been unable to forget.

"Oh, please: do sit down. I was afraid you hadn't recognised me. I saw you directly I came in, but although you looked at me you looked through me——"

"I don't understand—but I will sit down." She looked at the table. "The same wine! Well, I will make the best of it, but it's to be supper this time, you know."

"Of course it is: that is what I came for—to keep my promise. And I don't want you to drink what you don't like. I shall order you champagne."

"*Tant mieux*. Now, tell me, were you very disappointed that Sybil didn't come over to see you at once? Quite frankly?"

Gerard blushed a little. "Frankly—well, I am not disappointed now. I am very happy to have *you* here."

Illona drew her brows together. "Yes, but you'd be more happy if it was Sybil: you knew her first."

"I knew her first: that's true; but it doesn't mean that I like her best. Thank you, I am very content as I am, and if only you'll stop here."

"Well, I promise you that if she comes over I'll go away."

"I hope you won't. I should be very sorry and very cross if you did."

"We'll see—but I must dance now." The orchestra had started a tango and Illona had been called by Sybil Murray's sister. Of the two she was by far the better dancer. She danced with a high seriousness, her face turned to her companion, her feet moving as if they were part of the music. Now she had taken her hands from Claire's shoulders and was dancing with them clasped behind her own back. But still she and Claire might have been fastened together, for as they moved not one hairbreadth did their distance appear to vary. Almost they touched but not quite—a barely perceptible space separated them. Gerard drew his breath in pleasure. Never had he seen a sight which in its kind seemed to him so exquisite. And as they passed him he could watch Illona's face: she noticed him not at all; her mind, he thought, was on her art, her eyes shone with the joy of its exercise; her lips, pressed together, were like red coral washed by the sea; and a little red had mantled the ivory of her cheeks. Other couples were dancing, but by the side of these their movements had little grace, and soon they danced alone, and when after a while the music stopped the onlookers broke into a round of applause.

Illona came back at once to her place at Gerard's table. "You liked that—I can see you did. And so did I. I love to dance. It is like a passion with me: it is almost a madness. I should die if I could not dance. And now give me some champagne."

He looked at her and thought she was one of the most beautiful things he had ever seen. Suddenly she

turned to him, and he knew that from his eyes she realised his thoughts. She said nothing, but Gerard could feel the blood rush into his face.

For some minutes neither of them spoke. Gerard's mind was swept by doubts, hesitations, misgivings. He had always had a grip of himself. It was a thing in which he took pride. To lose now his equanimity, his full control, would surely be too foolish. And yet—He pretended to be occupied with his food. No, he had got himself into a fix: the only thing now to do was quickly to finish his supper; then he must contrive without too much awkwardness to give his young companion the two louis for which a couple of nights ago she had asked (but what if she hadn't been serious?); and he must get away. And whatever happened he must never come here again. He knew it now: this girl Illona disturbed him, provoked something in his nature, something whose existence he had never even suspected. He would, it should be easy to, avoid her. . . . Suddenly his left hand that lay idly by his plate was covered, half covered, with the little hand of his guest. For a brief moment it rested there warm and quiescent, and then her fingers closed over his in the ghost of a caress. He dared not look up.

"Oh, I am sorry, I've shocked you, startled you; I regret, Monsieur. But I thought you were feeling dull and that I'd cheer you up. Never mind—perhaps Sybil will come and talk to you directly."

Now it was Gerard's turn. Provoked, his mood of prudence was forgotten. "Look here! Listen to me! I don't want Sybil. I never wanted her. I know now why

I came back. Listen to me, I say. Look at me; don't look about you as if I wasn't here." He had seized her hand and held it firmly, careless who might see him. "I came back because I wanted to be with you again. It was you I remembered through these two days—you and your eyes."

Illona laughed harshly. "Ah, my dear, I have heard that sort of thing before. If a man can't have what he wants he looks round and chooses something else. It was Sybil you came for. I know; I'm not blind. That was what amused me, and that is why I came on your table to-night. It'll make her a little jealous too, and I like that; but I won't take you away from her. Her boy will go directly, and then you shall have her all to yourself. Now, *franchement*, isn't that what you want? Tell me; I shan't mind."

Here, at a moment when Gerard knew not whether dishonestly to protest—for in this matter, whatever his feelings were now, his conscience was not crystal clear—or to become sulky, Monsieur Piaci brought a pause to their talk. Sleek, smiling but peremptory, his "*Dansez, Illona!*" was very clearly an employer's order. It was the habit of the restaurateur to lose no time in summing up the cash value of his clients. Gerard Blundell had visited the Piccadilly twice; evidently he was not the kind of visitor to make money roll about the floor or champagne to flow like water. There was no reason why his *danseuse* should be left to talk to him all the evening. She was there to dance. Besides, they were both, he thought, becoming sentimental; the Englishman was a good-looking fellow—it would be far from an advantage

if the girl had a *béguin* for, fell in love with, him. She would be useless then, or almost useless, for the rest of the season. Illona looked at the *patron*, turned then to Gerard and, making a little grimace, was in a minute floating round the room in the arms of the yellow-haired dancer, who, he learned later on, was in very fact an English boy, a native of Camberwell, weak-looking but clean. He and his sister, a mere child, with thin legs that looked as if they might break at any moment, and who was surely much too young for so strenuous and nocturnal a life, called themselves the Kentucky Pigeons. They had a pride in being respectable.

Gerard realised very clearly that he was making a fool of himself, but he had no conception of the degree of his folly. Only one half of his mind deplored the position in which he was. The other half clamoured to be given precedence, was insistent, refused to be stilled. The first congratulated him that Piaci had appeared when he had, that he had been prevented in time from the utterance of fresh protests; the second raged at Illona's removal, was in a fury that her employer should call her by her Christian name, should order her about, that she should have been torn from him just when he had wished to answer her, just when he was ready to convince her that she was wrong about Sybil Murray. He watched her as she danced. This time at least she looked far from content. Her brows were drawn together. Surely anger clouded her face.

The dancer ended, and she came towards him. What should he say to her? But before she could reach him Claire Murray intercepted her, and after a moment's

conversation took her to a table where two men were sitting, two Englishmen—the damned place seemed full of his countrymen; at least it was a good thing that he knew no one of them. These were not of a type that Gerard liked. They were gross rather than fat, florid, bookmakers perhaps, or successful business men, too newly successful, from somewhere in the North. But whatever they were, Illona and her friend knew them evidently, and were on good terms with them. At once they were a party of four, laughing and talking, drinking champagne, clinking glasses. Illona's back was to Gerard: he could not see whether she herself was laughing; he could not even guess if she was happy. He cursed under his breath and looked round as if to call for his bill, a merely theatrical gesture, for he knew that he would not go until he had insisted on a finish to their broken talk. Then he turned again to his food: he, too, would at least appear as if he didn't care, as if he had sufficient occupation. He could wish now that Sybil Murray would come and talk to him—but she was pleasantly pre-occupied with what Illona had described as her English friend; they were holding one another's hands.

Under his brows Gerard watched the party of four on the other side of the room and wondered of what they were talking, his mind a furnace of anger. And in front of him was the bottle of champagne and the food that half an hour ago he had ordered for this girl. It was true that neither would spoil for the waiting, but what sort of a world was this anyway in which you asked someone to supper and were treated with so much rudeness? Wasn't he intending to pay her for her time?

Wouldn't it serve her right if actually he called for his bill and left the place?

Really now Gerard was nerving himself to go away, vowing that if he went never, never would he return, and that then not in any circumstances would he be brought to recognise again the girl who had treated him so—so—with so much rudeness, with so much contempt: he was making up his mind to this course when he saw Illona rise. The others seemed to protest, and the man at her side put out his arm. Something happened quickly. Gerard did not see what it was. The man seemed to touch her neck and to draw her to him. Illona's hand shot out. He heard her fingers on the man's cheek and, later on, saw the mark that they left. The man laughed grossly and held out his hand again, half rising from his chair. Now she was facing toward Gerard, and he saw that she was white with rage. She stamped her foot, and then, suddenly, turned and left them, walking slowly across to where her supper waited her return.

And when she reached the table she sank into her chair and laughed and lifted her glass to her mouth. One might have said that nothing untoward had occurred, but Gerard saw that her hand shook a little, that her shoulders heaved, that her breath came quickly. For a moment he said nothing. And then:

“I do not like your friends. Who, what are they?”

“Englishmen. I don't like them either very much, but they are rich and rather generous. That one there on the left has been here every night and gives me much money although he doesn't dance. He says now

that he wants to learn the tango. Then he'll come in the afternoon as well. There are all sorts—in my business one does as well as another. I was stupid just now.”

And that was the only reference she made to the little scene that had passed so quickly and had passed apparently unremarked, as if its like were of everyday occurrence.

For the moment he let her pursue her supper in silence. Her cheeks were a little aflame, her breath showed that she was excited, but gradually she recovered her calm. Soon she looked up at him with a friendly, shy smile:

“You'll come here again, eh? And what is your name?”

Neither question was convenient to answer, but Gerard had a little pride. Some men, he thought, might have hesitated at giving their true name in such a place, but if this girl was good enough to sit with him at supper, then surely she could be trusted with so small a secret; it would be an insult to himself not to give it to her.

“Gerard Blundell. Do you think you'll remember that? Will I come again? Why do you ask? Do you want me to? What's the good anyway? You'd think I came to see your friend--and anyhow you're always dancing and talking to other people.”

“Finished with Sybil. I'll believe now that you like me better. We won't talk about her. She is a good *camarade*. And of course I've got to dance. I've got to make money. And of course I've got to talk to everyone and sit and laugh with them and

make them come again: Piaci would throw me out quick if I didn't."

"‘Make them come again.’ That’s what you’re doing with me, isn’t it?"

"Don’t say that or I shall be angry—very. You’re different a little, not like the others."

"How can you tell? You’ve only spoken a few words with me."

"I’m no fool; I can see. But don’t come again if you don’t want to. Go away now if you like. You are trying to make me angry."

"I shouldn’t like to do that. But what do you do in Aix all day?" He wanted to find out where he would be most likely to run across her. Pure curiosity, of course. Or perhaps mere politeness. He surely did not intend to make use of any knowledge he might gain. Prudence and impulse chased one another through his head. For the moment prudence had the floor.

"What do I do all day? I don’t know. I’ve only been here five nights. I was never in Aix before. Sybil told me to come. I don’t much like it. It’s dull, but they tell me that’s because the season hasn’t really begun. I walk about and look in the shop windows, and then I have tea and write letters in a café, and listen to the music sometimes. And then I have dinner somewhere, and afterwards I go and dress—we’ve got to be ready here at eleven o’clock, you know."

A jealous thought seized Gerard. "Write letters? Who do you write to? Your lover? Why isn’t he here with you? I suppose he’s coming. Is he in Paris?"

"Oh, my lover; I haven't got a lover. I'm angry with him, finished with him. Do you truly want to know whom I write to?" She looked darkly at him. "I write every day to my mother. She's in Paris."

Gerard believed her. "Why doesn't she come down here? You can surely afford to have her here. You seem to make lots of money."

"She will come—when I can send her enough for her fare. I'd like her to be comfortable here. She must have a nice room. *Ça coûte chère, tu sais—vous savez*, I mean." She blushed, but Gerard's French was too feeble for him to recognise her slip: it had passed too quickly.

"You'll live together, won't you? At some hotel?"

"No, I have to live here. Besides, it doesn't do for me to live with my mother. We are better apart. I'm too fond of her."

"Does she like this you're doing?—does she approve of all this?" He sneered and motioned with his hand to indicate the hall and its contents. "Does she like people of that kind?" He nodded to where the rich Englishmen were still sitting, laughing loudly.

"My mother doesn't know anything about it. She's wise; she doesn't want to know, perhaps. But why do you ask all these questions? You English are all alike. You always want to be told everything. I think it's rude. It's not your affair."

It was Gerard's turn to blush. "Please forgive me. I didn't mean to be curious."

"Oh, yes, I'll forgive you. But you talk too much, my dear, all the same—and now I must dance again, or Piaci will be on my back."

Gerard sat in his chair and watched her. She crossed the room to the Englishmen he disliked, and seizing one of them by the ear—not the one who had offended her—lifted him laughing to his feet. Apparently he had been waiting for her to dance with him. It was a waltz the band was playing, playing very badly, but not too badly for the Englishman's dancing. Perhaps his energetic movements would have passed muster in the Five Towns or in Hull, but here, and with such a partner, he appeared to almost laughable disadvantage. Once as they passed his table Illona made a face at Gerard expressive of disapproval, but she danced on, and her own steps, shorn though they were of freedom, lacked none of their proper grace. Now and again either her partner would bump her into another couple or would himself push heavily backwards to someone's great discomfort. It was all taken in good part. No one seemed very much to mind. But the limit was passed when, tiring with this vigorous exercise and flagging in his steps, he trod on his partner's dress. No great harm was done, but Illona spoke angrily :

"*Asses, asses.* No, I've danced enough—and you've spoiled my new dress too," Gerard heard her say, and also, with chagrin, he saw her sit down by her partner's side. Apparently they were making it up. He watched her face alter from frowns to smiles. She took on an air of cajolery. The gross man squeezed her hand and she stroked his face. Then, after a minute, the music ceasing and the other couple, Claire and the second Englishman, coming back to the table, she got up and, kissing her hand to her partner, returned to Gerard.

But Gerard was in no mood to welcome her. He wished rather to rise and leave the place without a moment of delay. Jealousy or disgust—he did not know which—had driven out his liking for the girl. But he couldn't go at once. It was absurd, but there was his bill to attend to. He looked at her with hard eyes. Apparently she noticed and was not surprised at his change of mind. She narrowed her brows, regarding him curiously as if he had some secret she must tear from his heart, and then after a second she laughed a little :

"That was well done—oh, yes. He may tear my dress as often as he likes at that price." She held her hand open, and there in her warm palm lay one of the noble five louis pieces of France. "Generally he only gives me a couple of louis when he dances with me. And I earn it, you know. Now I must hide this," and bending down she seemed to slip the big coin into her shoe.

"I should think it would fall out when you dance."

"No fear. I've put it in my stocking. I've lost too much money to take any risks. I'm going to finish my supper now or you'll be really angry. Oh, yes, I saw ; I saw how angry you were when I was dancing—and afterwards. But what would you ? It's my business. I get tired, though. *Piaci* can go hang for half an hour. We'll be happy—*hein* ?"

"Now she's cajoling me," Gerard thought, but in his heart he was powerless to resist the childish charm with which very consciously she appealed to him. Also he could not help being ungracious :

"I was just going : I'm tired. But I'll wait till you've finished. Then you can go back to your friends—unless

you'd like the waiter to take these things over to their table at once."

Anger started into Illona's eyes, and as quickly faded: "No"—a very decided "no"—"No, here I am and here I shall stop, and I shan't hurry either, and you shall wait till I've finished—and perhaps longer. I like you. You please me. I'm not dull when you're here. Now you talk to me while I eat. 'This chicken's not so bad. That reminds me—if I had done as you said and gone over there I'd have had a new supper. They're not mean. The waiter wouldn't have had to take this. A supper's not so much. Oh, and I know: I'd like a consommé." She looked round and called the waiter. "Quick, a consommé with an egg in it—no, leave the chicken."

"I wish you'd let me give the waiter his orders," was Gerard's mild protest.

She pouted and patted his hand. "My dear, you must get used to me. I'm like that. I can't wait when I want anything. Besides, François knows me; he'll hurry for me—and for you he doesn't care that"—she snapped her fingers. "You're not generous enough."

Conversation on these terms wasn't very easy. Of course, of course he didn't like her any more, was no longer attracted by her, as for one dangerous moment he had been a while ago, but still it was curious and amusing to listen to her and to watch her face, flushed a little he could see now by the dancing and by the champagne she had drunk, and the play of her eyes under their serious brows, to look at the way her hair curled in brown tendrils at her neck and at the manner in which her head was set on her shoulders, lightly,

proudly. Anyhow, it was well that he understood her. There was no longer any risk of his making a fool of himself. . . .

"Well, you asked me lots of questions. Now it's my turn. Do you do anything? Any work, I mean. I can see you're not an officer. You've not got a soldier's back; and English officers all have moustaches. That doesn't make them very nice to kiss, you know. I prefer a mouth like yours. You said you were here for a cure. What sort of a cure? Nothing serious—men come here for all sorts of things, you know." Her face clouded. "Only rheumatism? You don't dance enough—that's what it is. You'll dance with me to-morrow, *hein*? Please, please. I promise I won't dance with anyone else to-morrow."

Gerard protested that he didn't dance and that he never had danced.

"Oh, well, I'll teach you—yes, for nothing, and I generally charge a hundred francs a lesson, you know. You can come here at five o'clock: we'll arrange. Sybil gives lessons every afternoon and there's always the band. But what do you do when you're not taking a cure? You're in business. What sort of business? Never mind: I can see you don't want to tell me. *Pas gentil ça*. I like better boys who have nothing to do—and plenty of money. But what do you do all day in Aix when you're not taking your baths? Do you go up the mountains? I'd like to do that. But not on foot, you know. I don't like walking. I get tired so quickly. My little feet hurt. I shall take an auto. Some boy I know is sure to come down here directly. Then I shall go

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everywhere. Sybil knows all the places to see. For the moment I can do nothing but go to the Grand-Café and write to my lover—No, that's a mistake." She broke off and covered her lips with her hand. Gerard could see that she was making fun of him. "I meant my mother. I haven't got a lover; I told you. I told you too much. But you know the Grand-Café at five o'clock is not so bad. I'd rather be in Paris—but still it does. And it's near the post office. Really, that's almost all I've seen of Aix."

The while she chattered Gerard was watching her. He determined to go when she had finished her supper. A profound fatigue had seized him. He was too tired to talk. Perhaps she knew it. For a few moments she ate in silence, and then :

"You're tired. I can see it. Better you go, my dear. I don't like you to be tired when you're with me. You'll have a bad souvenir. Ask for the bill—and, say, give the waiter five francs. He expects it, you know."

But Gerard had a serious preoccupation. How was he to give his guest the two louis that she had asked for the other night? Now the thought that she had not been serious had passed, but all the same it was jolly awkward. To give a young woman money in a restaurant, before all the world, required knowledge, technique. But he must do it. If he didn't do it quickly she might ask for them again—and that would be unbearable.

"Here, give me your hand," he said. She stretched it across the table to him. And quickly taking the two gold coins from his pocket, where they had lain in waiting, he passed them to her as if he was simply holding her hand.

And then he saw again the red rise to her cheeks. She left her hand in his, and smiled and laughed.

"Truly, I had forgotten that," she said. "You—you are not so bad." She jumped up. "Well, good-bye—no, I mustn't say that : that's the same as adieu, isn't it ? Au revoir." She was gone.

Nothing was left but for Gerard to pay his bill. It was a very big bill. He didn't understand how it could be so big. And the waiter seemed to take the five francs as if it was his due : he hardly said "thank you."

CHAPTER IX

“IT’S my business.” The words of the young dancer with whom he had spent so many hours of the night did not trouble Gerard’s sleep. He lay like a log, dreaming not at all. But they leapt to his memory directly he was awakened and troubled him through all the early ritual of the day. “It’s my business.” Illona—her name was Illona. He thought of her as Illona. Was it truly her business to dedicate her youth and her fresh young beauty, her haunting grace, to the service of lust? Was it truly her business to live by enticing, cajoling, exciting men? Some of her phrases worried his brain: “I like better boys who have nothing to do—and plenty of money”; “I haven’t got a lover: I’m angry with him.” And his eyes saw again and again the scene at the table when she had cajoled the gross Englishman and had stroked his cheek. But at once that picture would be blotted out and he would see her face, and her eyes searching his own with an earnestness, with a force, with an entreaty that he associated vaguely in his thought with some memory of a painted Madonna. Was it that her nature was diverse, changing from hour to hour? Was she truly a

vessel of easy vice? Or had she strayed by some stupid error of the disposer of fortune into this world of the devil, keeping the while that dark, instructed innocence that he had seen in the pools of her eyes? Again and again he asked himself the same questions, racked himself with the same doubts. For Gerard just then life was very bitter.

Later on, when the day was half gone and he was free to rest or to walk, he went out into the town determined that he would fatigue himself again to the point of forgetting Illona, the Piccadilly, and all that had passed in the night. But the determination was vain. Clouds swept over the mountains, and soon it rained. Aix in rain was intolerable. What was there to do? What was there to see? There might be new papers in the Cercle. There were, and those that were available were stupid, and those that he would really have liked to see were in the hands of stuffy, aged people who looked as if they would never finish their desultory reading. The trees in the garden dripped water steadily. The place seemed full of inquiring Germans and opulent Americans. All the people who made Aix smart and amusing were at home in their hotels, the chic hotels, playing bridge, no doubt. Some people rather liked walking in the rain, but he did not. After a while, and sheltering under his umbrella, he walked up to the Crédit Lyonnais to cash a cheque. Not yet did he want more money, but he might as well kill time by making the acquaintance of his temporary banker. And, as a matter of fact, his amusements at the Piccadilly had rather made a hole in the small sum

he had brought out from London. He would be more comfortable with another couple of hundred francs in his pocket.

Gerard came out from the *Crédit Lyonnais* and looked about him. It was nearly half-past four already. Where was the *Grand-Café*? He rather thought he would like a drink before going back to his hotel to write his evening's letters. To drink between meals was not one of his habits, but really this weather was so damnable that one might be excused so mild a departure from custom.

The *Grand-Café* belongs rather to old Savoy than modern Aix. It is of the town rather than of the bath. Fashionable visitors do not throng its terrace. Its thriving counterpart could be found in every town in France. Gerard chose an obscure seat in a corner, sheltered but in the open air, where he could watch the coming and going in the little *Place*. There would be time to finish his drink before five o'clock. He had chosen the *Grand-Café* with the clear intention of seeing the kind of place in which Illona spent her leisure, but he was equally clear in the intention of going away before the hour of her likely arrival. Five o'clock, she had said. But now it occurred to him that if he got up and walked back to his hotel he would be as likely as not to run against her in one or other of the few streets which contained the shops she passed her time looking into. That wouldn't do. It would be better to sit where he was and then to slip away unobserved after her arrival. The waiter should bring him a paper. Reading it, sheltering behind it, he would be less likely to be recognised. The plan had other advantages. It would perhaps enable him to see the girl away

from the trappings, the passionate air, the gay uniform of her life. To do that would as likely as not kill the last interest he felt in her. This wet cold day with its grey light would complete the disillusion that the ugly scene of yesterday had begun. Besides, it would be interesting to see her in ordinary everyday clothes, in a hat, to see her in a normal life, doing normal things, not as he now pictured her, moving rhythmically, her whole figure a-quiver with the joy of dancing. . . .

From over the top of his paper Gerard looked at the life of the Place. The rain had stopped now, but the streets were wet and disagreeable. There was nothing smart about the Place Carnot save the leisurely, noisy motor-cars. The people who were about were all good townsmen, their wives and daughters. He looked at his watch: it was getting on for a quarter past five. The local paper contained little of interest; his drink was finished; he had paid the waiter. It would be more sensible to go. Very possibly the girl had talked merely for the sake of talking, and the Grand-Café was not really one of her haunts. It was more than likely that she would stop indoors on a day like this. No, she was telling the truth—she said she came here, because it was near the post office, to write her daily letter to her mother. That being so, she should come from the direction of the Piccadilly. He turned his head and looked through the glass screen—and then at length he had his reward. He could watch her with safety. She was walking fast, hurrying rather, with a definite purpose. How curiously she walked! In spite of her intention, and her speed, she seemed to drift along, to be

blown as leaves are before the wind. Her dress was simple enough. It was neither costly nor smart. It suited her and the day, and was of some dark colour. Dress, did he call it? It was a cloak rather. She wore no gloves, and her hat—well, it was a jolly enough little hat in its way, of unrelieved black, and the manner in which she wore it gave the one provocative note to her otherwise perfectly ordinary appearance.

Gerard was satisfied that he had not been noticed. He would give her time to settle down to her writing, and then he would slip out as he had planned. He had seen her. He had now a new image of her. There was nothing alluring about it, nothing to vex his dreams, and yet, although he had hardly seen her face and although the cloak that she wore had hidden her form, he felt that if he ever thought of her again it was thus that he would picture her, drifting along the wet pavement, uncared for, unsheltered—yes, a poor little figure.

From where he sat Gerald could see, not directly but in a mirror, that she had taken her place, that the waiter had brought her coffee in a long glass and that she was already writing, bending over her task. She wouldn't see him now. He need have no fear. He would go at once. . . .

"You are so busy with your letters, Mademoiselle Illona, that you do not recognise your friends. I think your mother is very fortunate in her daughter." Gerard could have sworn that nothing was further from his intention than to go and talk to the girl. He just found himself doing so. It wasn't the result of any impulse.

She looked up, unstartled. "Ah, my dear, I wondered whether you would come and speak to me—or, no, I was sure you would. Now you shall sit down. I shall soon have finished this. My mother shall have a short letter for once. She won't mind. She never tells me if she likes my letters even: perhaps she doesn't read them." She bent again over her paper, and in a minute, having addressed an envelope, she folded what she had written. Then opening the black silk bag that she carried, no very new bag, she took out three notes that Gerard could not help seeing were each for a hundred francs, folded them, and laid them inside her letter.

"My mother can take better care of them than I can, so I send them to her. She likes money. She likes buying things. I don't. And now tell me why you didn't come to speak to me at once. *Pas gentil, ça.*"

"One reason was that I didn't like to disturb you. And I had no idea you'd seen me. You must get very tired of talking to men. You told me you came here to write letters and I thought perhaps you'd rather be alone and quiet. You'll have plenty of noise and plenty of interruptions later on where you dance."

Gerard, who had done as he had been bidden and had sat himself down at the girl's side, was conscious that he was, without intention, adopting a more remote, a less intimate tone than that at which they had arrived overnight. Daylight had its sober influence, and the change in her appearance and the task on which she had just been employed both helped to keep him at a distance. The little tentative freedoms that he had allowed himself, that had seemed natural with the dancer, would perhaps

be unseemly with this dutiful letter-writing daughter. Also, though he was only half aware of it, a note of superiority and a hint of sarcasm were creeping into his tone. This Illona was surely far more attractive under electric light. He no longer feared her. She was a coloured moth of the dark hours: now in the daytime her appeal was lessened, perhaps indeed it did not in fact exist. Truth was that he had hardly seen her face as she had entered, and now the gloom which hung over the corner she had chosen hid the green fire of her eyes, clouded the delicate ivory of her skin, robbed her mouth of its scarlet. At two o'clock in the morning a man might easily be deceived, might even make a fool of himself. Now that he had, almost by accident, seen her by day he was surely safe.

The girl answered him: "I told you last night: you talk too much. What you say isn't true. You didn't want to speak to me. But when you saw me, somehow you couldn't help it. But you can go away now. You're not frank with me. You see I was right in what I said yesterday: it's Sybil you want. Well, she comes here sometimes, but not so often as me: she's generally about with her boy."

Gerard was so little used to being treated with this degree of independence by the few women whom he had known that each of these brief sentences had a very definite and even irritating effect on his mind. He determined to dominate in some way this ungentle spirit, to show that 'e could be master. He settled himself more firmly in his seat and, having called for coffee, for the good of the house rather than because he wanted it,

he tried as a beginning to hold his companion's eyes with his own—and failed egregiously. There was something in her sombre earnestness, some quality in the sad regard with which she seemed actually to search his mind rather than simply to look into his face, that defeated challenge. For the moment he felt confused and sought refuge in words :

“I thought we'd agreed to finish with Sybil Murray. She's very pretty and she dances very well and I liked her very much until I saw you, but I think you are far, far more beautiful and you dance better too—you are ever so much more graceful.”

“That's where you are all wrong, my dear. Some dances I am better at than Sybil—you've never seen my Russian dance—but there isn't a better waltzer in the world than she is. She's like a feather. And she's so graceful ; she's so well made. And everyone likes her ; people think her very pretty. But I don't think Sybil is going to pay much attention to you. She wanted you at first, but Piaci made inquiries about you and he says you're not rich—and if you're not a rich boy you're not much good to her.”

Gerard was nettled at the restaurateur's opinion of his position and importance, but it was not a matter which he felt himself competent to discuss. He fell back on another point :

“You're always talking about ‘boys’—‘Sybil's boy,’ ‘a rich boy,’ and so on. I wish you'd let me teach you one thing. Then you'll have reason to be grateful to me even if I'm not rich enough for you and your friend and that Italian scoundrel. You oughtn't to talk about

'boys.' It's common, vulgar. That man who was with Sybil was a man, not a boy. I'm a man, not a boy. Only common people call men 'boys,' common people of the kind you're not likely to meet, barmaids and so on."

"Oh, we meet all kinds. But I'll remember—*et merci*. Anyhow, what I said is true. Sybil only likes rich boys—men, I mean."

"She's learnt the value of money very early: why, she's only a child."

The girl laughed. "Sybil's the same age as I am. She's been nineteen for three years. We've danced together at the Trianon all that time and I know. She's twenty-two this year."

"Then how old is her sister?"

"That's not her sister, my dear. They're partners—they say they're sisters: it helps in the business, and they're——" she stopped and Gerard looked in vain for her to finish her sentence. Instead she went on: "But why are you so interested in Sybil? It's not polite."

"I'm not. I'm interested in you and everyone about you just because they are about you—and I wish the waiter would turn on the light so that I might look at you again and see if you are as pretty now as you were last night."

"*Pas de chichis!* You thought I was pretty last night but you don't think so now. You are sure I'm not and you just want to make certain. But get a light—the waiter 'll give it you if you ask for it."

"No, I'm in no hurry: you don't need to go yet. What do you do in the morning?"

"Stop in bed. Why, we don't generally get to bed till six. We've got to have some sleep."

"Then what time do you get up?"

"That depends on what I've got to do. I generally wake up about eleven. The noise in the street wakes me. My bedroom's on the front—I share it with Lucy. You saw her: she's the girl with the black hair, rather fat. I'm going to insist on a room to myself. Then I send the *femme de chambre* next door for coffee and cakes."

"Why, you live in the Piccadilly, you said: surely they give you your food?"

"No, not a scrap. We can't even buy it there: Piaci says he can't keep a lot of servants to wait on us. We have to pay for all our own food and, except that first breakfast, to have it outside. It's expensive, you know."

"I said he was a scoundrel, your Piaci. But if you have to get all your meals in restaurants what advantage do you get by living in the place? Why don't you live somewhere else? Wouldn't it cost less?"

"Oh, he won't let us. Something to do with the police, I think. We've got to live there. We're a sort of slave, and Madame Piaci, she watches everything we do. Of course I'm new; the others have all been before. When we start we have to sign a contract to stop for the season. We don't get paid anything, but every night, you know, one of us goes round with *la quête*, the plate, to collect what we can from the clients, and we're supposed to share up what we're given."

"Why only supposed?"

"Oh, we have to take it to Madame Piaci at the

caisse, and the money's put away to divide at the end of the season. The girls say we don't get the half—no, not nearly. And then of course they take our fines out of it."

"Fines? What fines?"

"We're fined for all sorts of things. *Cinq francs d'amende* for not being ready at eleven o'clock is the commonest. Ten francs if we don't go and dance *tout de suite* when Piaci tells us. However, I can't complain much. They're very polite to me. They ask me to have supper on their table sometimes. I don't go: I can't leave my *camarades*. I wish I could; the supper they give us is so bad. I was wrong when I said Piaci gave us no food. He gives us supper in the morning when everyone has gone and while the waiters are sweeping up. All the old scraps."

"Well, you can't be hungry. You get supper every night, surely—more than one."

"Yes, I do, and Sybil and Claire—but the others don't always. You've got to be a success to be offered supper, *vous savez*. We've got to ask for it though. That's part of the business: Piaci would soon be on our backs if we didn't."

Gerard found all this very interesting. It was the same everywhere apparently. Ilona was describing a variant on the "living-in system." But at this point their conversation was suddenly interrupted by the lighting up of the corner in which they were sitting. The rain had begun again. The sky was black from mountain to mountain.

"And now Monsieur Gerard Blundell—I have a

splendid memory, you see!—you can take a good look at me and you'll find that I'm not nearly as pretty as you first thought me. You won't come again to the Piccadilly, *hein?* Well, perhaps I shan't miss you—and I'm sure Sybil won't. More and more people are coming now. The season has really begun. Oh, we shall be very busy, and we shall all of us make much money. I want it, you know. I have lots of expenses. My mother costs dear and I'm happy when she can have all she wants."

But Gerard was hardly listening. He was looking at the girl, asking himself what really was her character, what thoughts really passed behind those sad, brooding eyes. Nothing that she was wearing helped her beauty, and yet surely she was beautiful. It was a type that he had never seen before, Slav perhaps. He did not know. There was a picture by Manet in the Luxembourg that she reminded him a little of, a picture of an older woman whose chin rested on her fan as she looked out from a balcony on to the street below. The shadows that outlined the ivory of the girl's face were of the kind that Manet loved to paint. And her skin was of that unlively, placid, single hue that Manet had seized again and again. Yes, she was beautiful.

The girl pushed back her chair and stood up. "I shall go now. Yes, I know it's raining. *Tant pis pour moi.* I shall drive. Au revoir, Monsieur." She smiled. "You shall pay for my coffee—*c'est pas grand chose, ça.*"

"Please sit down for one minute, Mademoiselle. I want to say something."

"*Bien*—but what is it? And don't call me Mademoiselle; I am not used to it."

"What am I to call you? I don't know your surname. What is it?"

"Call me Illona simply. Everyone does. I don't like Mademoiselle."

"All right, Illona—Illona is what I shall call you in future then. So we're friends now?"

"No, not so fast. We are not friends because you use my *petit nom*. And perhaps it isn't my name any way. But everyone calls me Illona—even Piaci." She smiled maliciously. "What am I waiting here for? I want to go."

"I was on the point of asking you to have dinner with me to-night. It would be jolly if you would. I'm like you: I find Aix very dull; my friends haven't arrived either. So do come. We'll dine anywhere you like." The idea had been of rapid growth. Gerard stood away from himself and pondered what he said—but not till after he had said it, not till it was too late for prudence, for revision. He knew that he would like the girl to dine with him; even he urgently wished her to do so. But why had his resolution failed? He had been so sure that he would not see her. And when, in spite of his determination, he had done so, he had been so sure that he had seen enough, he had felt so secure against any return of that brief attraction, that sudden enchantment. He was acting the part of a fool—oh! but it was pleasant, and anyhow it should soon be over.

"Yes, I'll dine with you, my dear. Anywhere you like. But it mustn't be too chic. I'm not chic, me. What time is it? Half-past six. I've got to go to the post with

this letter and I must go and change my dress—and then you'll fetch me at eight, *hein?* ”

The idea of fetching his companion from her lair, of advertising so clearly, so definitely, to her employer and to her sordid *camarades* the degree of his folly, was a little too much even for Gerard's politeness. And he thought with shrinking of those knowing servants at the door.

“No, I won't come to the Piccadilly for you. After Piaci's searching into my affairs I'd be shy. Quite wrong Piaci was, by the way: one's hotel isn't the best judge of one's position, you know. I'll tell you what, I thought we'd dine at that restaurant near the entrance to the Casino, Nikola's isn't it called? It looks quiet enough. And I think I've heard of it. I'll be there at eight o'clock punctually. You come in a carriage and I'll be waiting for you.”

“It's no use; I won't do it. Come into a restaurant alone—me! Not for a million.”

Gerard was at a loss. He thought for a moment. “Very well. I don't see why you shouldn't come to the restaurant. You live in restaurants. And I could have waited outside on the pavement——”

“It's no use: I wouldn't come.”

“I was going to say that I'll wait for you on one of the chairs in the Place du Revard, opposite the café in the main road. You just drive up. I'll be looking out for you, and we can drive on together.”

“All right. But you be there, mind: I shan't wait a second. And now I must go. I haven't nearly enough time.”

They walked out together. A *chasseur* called a carriage. Gerard helped his companion in. "Where to? Oh, the post—or will you trust me with your letter?"

"Of course I will. Register it though. It has money inside."

She was gone, and for a moment Gerard stood watching the slow downpour and wondering at the confidence that she had shown. Surely the life this girl lived should make her more distrustful of strangers. Perhaps, perhaps, it was that she liked him.

CHAPTER X

GERARD was kept waiting outside the Café du Centre only twenty minutes. The women in England whom he knew had not inured him to unpunctuality. His mother was always exact in her engagements and as for his wife—well, if she was late he told her frankly that she had no right to add to his troubles as a business man by wasting his time. But with Illona it was different. He knew instinctively that he had to judge her by different standards. And he realised that even a mild complaint she would neither welcome nor understand. He had had to hurry to be at the place appointed at the exact hour. He had hurried his dressing and, more than ever before, he had hurried his letter to his wife. Ideas had not come easily to him. What was there for him to tell her? He had described the incidents of his cure already; she had been told all about Aix and the walks he had taken. Until to-day he had been able with a good heart to deplore her absence, to enlarge on his boredom, to say how much he missed her, how happy he would be if he had her with him to share the novelty of his life; but to-night, although his conscience did not trouble him at

all seriously, he had not the heart for a repetition of those caressing regrets. It was a dry letter that he dropped into the post office five minutes before he rendered himself up at the meeting-place.

What in the name of wonder could the girl have to do that could keep her over her dressing for more than an hour and a half? When one is not sure of oneself, when one's nerves are troublesome, twenty minutes seems an hour. Gerard tired of sitting. He looked again and again at his watch. He paced to and fro. Luckily the rain had ceased. It was not a bad night. The quick carriages of the South of France rattled round the corner which led to the Piccadilly. He watched one after another, sure that the next would slow down or would pull up with a jerk and a southern "*Hé-là!*" He began to count them. If she was not in one of the next dozen he would go into the café and telephone to the Piccadilly. He supposed that would be possible. There was no reason why he should stop here all the evening.

"Monsieur Blundell, Monsieur Gerard——"

He turned, to see peeping out from the hood of the carriage a woman's head and shoulders. It was Illona, and in a moment he was seated at her side, closer to her than he had ever been. He fancied that she leant a little towards him. She was laughing.

"I wondered how long you would stick there with your back turned to me. Almost I couldn't be sure it was you."

"I'd been waiting twenty minutes—but I'd expected you to come the other way, down the hill."

"Was I late? *Ça ne fait rien*. I went to the shop down there to get some white gloves. I couldn't dine with you without gloves."

They came quickly to the restaurant, and then for a moment Gerard was shy. He had not the restaurant habit. He was conscious of a great deal of light and, although it was early in the season, many of the tables were full. While he was paying the driver Illona had preceded him up the steps. The *maître d'hôtel* was scraping a little. A new client had possibilities. It seemed to Gerard that people looked at him. He was not easy in his carriage, in his mind, as he followed his guest to one of the tables at the back of the terrace. And then they were seated opposite one another, and he could look at her. Her cloak she had refused to remove, pushing it back off her shoulders; her hair was both elaborately and simply done; her eyes shone. She looked pleased with herself and with the world. All this was as it should be, but Gerard still felt shy. Their previous encounters had been almost accidental. Now, formally, she was his guest. How should he treat her? What should he talk to her about? For the moment the ordering of the meal distracted his attention. She would help not at all. "*Ça m'est égal*" was all he could get her to say. The *maître d'hôtel* did most of the choosing. This wasn't Gerard's world. The wine card he did understand, but his recent experience made him think that his knowledge would just now be of little use: he would have to order champagne. But to his surprise here Illona helped him:

"If you want champagne for yourself, *bien*; I'll drink

it. But I'd rather have Bordeaux. I have too much champagne when I dance."

At length they were alone. Quiet as a little mouse, Illona waited for her soup. Gerard avoided looking at her. He feared to meet her eyes. He suspected that she was a little overawed by her surroundings. The silence was long drawn out. Which of them would speak first? With an assumption of ease which was, he hoped, successful enough to cloak his very real embarrassment, Gerard looked round the restaurant at the other tables. A few of the faces seemed familiar to him, but they were figures that he had seen in Aix, not in London. No one of them was from his hotel. He felt reassured. Three men dining together were, he was certain, the three whose noisy success in the gaming rooms had offended him a few nights before—three nights ago. He had already been in Aix for five nights; this was the sixth; fifteen were still to pass. In fifteen days no great harm could come to him. Surely he could hold himself in leash for so short a time. . . . All the same it wasn't exactly prudent to be dining here to-night in what he realised now was one of the fashionable corners of the town. However clear his own conscience might be—and for the moment he felt he was doing no great harm—other people would hardly view his proceeding with sympathetic understanding. His young companion might be lonely and so might he, but, after all, his friends, most of them, would make light of such an excuse. Acacia Road, Wimbledon, would be shocked, grieved, outraged; Pall Mall and his partners would be amused and disappointed and intrigued. But

he was doing a kind action. Fate would perhaps prevent his being seen. He was, he hoped, going to be amused, and as for Illona—well, it wouldn't do her anything but good to dine quietly for once in a while with someone who was not all the time attempting to further an ignoble suit. He must talk to her though.

"Where do you usually dine, Illona? And do you dine alone?"

"Sometimes alone; sometimes with Sybil and Claire. *Ça dépend*. We dine often at that brasserie there in the Place. You can come there if you like—but no; I don't want you to see Sybil again. And you wouldn't care for it. It's quite bourgeois, you know. But I was asking myself how long you were going to let me sit opposite you without talking to me. I don't like it. I want to be amused, me."

Gerard excused himself. He could hardly tell her that conversation was not too easy for him, knowing her so little, knowing her world not at all. Doubtless too the conversation she was used to was not the kind that he could provide, however much he worked. She looked around in her turn and then quickly her eyes came back to her plate and he saw that her cheeks had reddened. Following the direction that her glance had taken he realised that the three young Englishmen were the cause of her embarrassment. They were looking at his table and at his guest, and perhaps also at him, with an amused but not impolite interest.

"Do you know those men behind me there, on the left, those Englishmen?"

Illona blushed more even than before. "No—yes.

I know them. Two are good friends of mine. Often I danced with them in Paris. At the Trianon. One is a very good dancer. He's an officer. Ernest his name is. He's *gentil*, you know. I like him very much. I didn't know he was here. Now I shall have a good time." She clapped her hands a little.

Gerard was both curious and jealous. "You've danced with him. He's a friend of yours. He'll find you at the Piccadilly and you'll dance again. That's all. I don't call that a good time."

"Not at all, my dear. He'll take me out *en auto*. Often when he came to Paris he took me out—to Versailles, to Fontainebleau, *partout, partout*. Not the other; only the one with the red hair. I don't like red hair. I like your hair. But he's really nice. And he's rich—and he can dance so well."

"And does he make love to you?" Gerard could not help the question. It slipped out.

Illona narrowed her eyes and looked at him. A half smile passed over her face and vanished. "Oh, a little—not seriously. *Il est gentil*. I'd like him to make love to me. *Il est beau*, except for his hair. Truly though he's a *camarade*. He's got respect for me. You English are strange sometimes. Not always of course. Young Englishmen are very romantic. They search always for real love. One laughs at them on Montmartre for that. It's easy to pretend, and then for a time one makes much money, you know."

"You shock me, Illona. I don't like that."

"Don't fear. I didn't mean myself. But all the *grues* amuse themselves with Englishmen. An English-

man thinks always of *l'amour*”—she rolled the word out—“of romance. He’s sentimental; he thinks he will keep a girl for himself and that she will love him for ever. He comes to Paris for a week-end and gives her two hundred francs and then he comes back again in a fortnight and is sure she’s been faithful. Oh, how we laugh sometimes!”

It was Gerard’s turn to knit his brows. “What girls? You and Sybil and Claire? Surely not. I don’t understand.”

“Me and Sybil and Claire? *Penses-tu!* You make me angry, my dear. I mean the *grues*, the *cocottes*. Some of the dancers are like that too, but not all.”

“But you don’t know that kind? They’re not friends of yours?”

“You amuse me. Of course I know them. We’re all together. Some of the *grues* dance; some of the dancers behave like *grues*. *Voilà tout!* Victor won’t let every woman come to the Trianon. He’s a little particular. But *au fond* they’re all alike.”

Gerard’s jealous anxiety did not allow him to pursue the subject. “This Ernest. Did he know you were in Aix? Did he come for you?”

“You ask him, my dear. Naturally he came for me. No, of course he didn’t. You are stupid. But now he’s found me he’ll be glad. He says no one dances like me. And he gives me much money. One day he gave me five hundred francs. Always he gives me a hundred.”

“And he doesn’t really make love to you? Where does he live? What’s his other name?”

“Chisholm, I think. I don’t know for certain. I did

know, but I've forgotten. I've got letters of his, but I never wrote to him. He stops at the Meurice in Paris. He doesn't come often, but the night he arrives he always comes to the Trianon and then we have a good time."

For a minute the conversation languished. Gerard believed everything his companion had told him. But he had not learned all he wanted to know. He wondered how he could lead up to the subject about which his heart troubled him. The waiter brought now a new dish, a strange dish. Without intention Gerard was watching his guest, looking at the lights in her eyes, taking pleasure in the ivory of her face. Suddenly he realised that she was embarrassed again. He wondered why. Her regard had not strayed from the table. It was something of which she had thought, perhaps. Anyhow she was not going on with her meal.

"You aren't eating, Ilona. Don't you like that? It's supposed to be good."

She laughed nervously. "Oh, yes—but I'm not hungry. Let me alone a moment. I'm thinking. Eat yourself, my dear."

Gerard turned his attention to his plate. The *maitre d'hôtel* was justified in his recommendation. He looked up, a smile of sympathy with the trouble that he had not recognised coming into his eyes. Ilona was eating now. She misunderstood his smile, and she laughed, more nervously than before.

"I'm ang y now. Truly angry. You are not kind, you know."

"Why, Ilona, what have I done?"

"*Pas de blague*. You knew I was waiting to see how one eats this dish. I haven't experience, me. I'd be ashamed to make a mistake before all the world. You knew that. Why didn't you help me? They give fork and spoon and knife and I don't know which of them to use. *Tu n'es pas gentil, toi*." She was blushing and Gerard saw, but the "*tu*" passed unregarded. It was as well. It had not been used with intention.

"Why, Illona, that's nothing, nothing at all. I had no idea you were in difficulties; truly I hadn't. I'm often like that myself. How can one always know what one's eating or what one ought to use?" and then, seeing that his guest was still unhappy, suspecting indeed that tears were collecting in the corners of her eyes, he did what she had once done with him, did it without thought, almost unconsciously—he covered her hand with his own quickly. It was a moment's caress. At once he regretted it, but Illona did not suspect the regret. The action calmed her, stilled her uneasiness. And it did more.

"Another time you'll tell me, *hein*? But perhaps you won't ask me to dinner again. Perhaps you're ashamed of me now. But I'm enjoying myself, you know. You make me comfortable."

"I'm so glad, Illona. But you'll be busy with that Captain Chisholm, or whatever his name is—your English boy, you'd call him, eh?—and you won't have any time to spare for new friends. I'll ask you again quickly enough if I can be sure you'll come. But what about that good time you're going to have?"

"Don't take too seriously everything I say, my dear.

Now I'll tell you true, though: I'll always come when you want me. The other shall be second."

Gerard's interest in his guest had increased with the knowledge that she had other reputable friends. Now as he ate he watched her, talking the while about nothing in particular. What he had done, little though it was, and this new note that had come into their relation, troubled his conscience. He felt that once more his defences were being broken down, that he was being carried along on that same current that three nights before had threatened to engulf him. There was nothing in Illona's face, in the tone of her voice, in the poise of her head on her slender shoulders, but what gave him exquisite pleasure. And her mind—she seemed to know so much, to have lived in so dark a world, and yet to be clean, frank, open of heart. He could have loved her if he had been free. It was well that he was bound. Now he could be her friend perhaps. That would do no harm. . . .

"They amuse me, those boys behind you—those men, I mean. They keep trying to catch my eye. They want to drink my health. But they don't want anyone to notice."

Gerard looked up. He had just discovered that he could see the three Englishmen in the mirror behind Illona's head. "I can see them, you know."

Illona herself, now that her frankness had taken away any need for secrecy, looked without hesitation at her admirers. And Gerard saw the red-haired one, a handsome, vigorous specimen of the young English officer, catch her eye, lift his glass and smile. Illona

blushed again and then returned his smile, quickly looking down as if to stop any other manifestation of friendship. Apparently the young man had achieved his immediate aim. The party pushed back their chairs and called for their coats. As they went out the one who was her own friend looked again at Illona and bowed. So he might have greeted any friend of his sister.

“Well, they’re gone,” Illona said. “They don’t know I’m at the Piccadilly, so perhaps they won’t find me. I don’t care. But I must go now too. It’s after ten. I have to dress. You’ll put me in a carriage? You needn’t offer to come with me. I know you don’t like to. I see more than I say. Truly I’ve enjoyed myself with you. I feel comfortable, happy, gay. Good-bye, my dear—no, *au revoir*. I’ll see you again surely.”

CHAPTER XI

GERARD the next morning waved the coffee and rolls away from his bed and turned heavily on the pillow. He was expecting the arrival of his letters, the post from London, surely a letter from his wife, possibly one from Vivian. To-day he awaited their coming almost with distaste. They would be in answer to the first letters he had written from Aix; they would deal with the place as he had then described it. They would be out of date. Things had altered. His mood was not now what it had been six days ago. On a cure one ought to be free of correspondence, to be spared the preoccupations of receiving and sending letters, of describing one's days, of saying whether one had slept well, of whether one felt better or worse. A cure should be a withdrawal from the world, a retreat. What one did on a cure ought not to be counted in the tale of one's years. One should be free to follow one's inclination. In the after-time one should look back and divide one's life into two parts, the part before the cure, the part after. The cure itself should be free of other rules, restrictions, duties than those imposed by the cure physician. Not that Gerard wanted to break loose. He

played with the idea of freedom not because he had any wish to throw aside all the inhibitions that ordinarily governed his conduct, but because he did wish very frankly that for these brief weeks he might forget the smaller obligations of his life and surrender himself without grudge or misgiving to the pleasure of the moment, to the life that he could live in Aix if only he could feel free, to the sun, to the beauty of the mountains. He stretched with a vivid sense of luxury under the thin coverlet that was between his body and the flickering sun that played upon the bed. Surely all this was better than working in London. He would normally be in Pall Mall by now, opening letters in which old ladies would be asking for a good claret at sixteen shillings a dozen and retired colonels complaining that the last port his firm had recommended was nothing like as good as its predecessor. Certainly these three weeks, whether he looked on them as a necessity or as a holiday, would do him ever so much more good than a month at Bude. . . .

There were three letters that morning. One was from Vivian. He read it first. It wasn't very long and it didn't tell him very much, but it contained a drawing of Dickie's stumps being sent in all directions in a "match" in which he had succeeded in making three runs; and its few lines gave him real pleasure. Basil had caught a cold, but all the same they were starting for Bude the next day. Mary's letter was of some length. It dealt mostly with the difficulties of arranging their departure. Mr Humphries, Dickie's schoolmaster, hadn't been too amiable about letting Dickie off the last six weeks of

term; the maids had been more than usually annoying, and Edith, the cook, had given notice. "It's too provoking—I can't leave Ellen alone in the house while we're away—I don't suppose she'd stop anyhow—and if Edith was going away at her month I didn't want her to stop on with her and I told her she'd better go tomorrow when we go, and I'm paying her her wages and board wages too. So I've told Ellen we'll take her down to Bude instead of her usual holiday—for there'll be a spare room as you won't be there—but that she must make herself useful and do some sewing for Vivian—I think she likes the idea—And I've arranged that Portman" (Gerard recognised one of the local constables to whose wife Mary had been kind) "and his wife shall come and live here—they've got no children. She's to keep the place clean and we're to pay her ten shillings a week. It is all very provoking and costs a lot of money that we can't afford, but it cannot be helped now—I shall try not to spend so much at Bude. We must try to be economical—you must be spending a dreadful lot at Aix-les-Bains—Dickie's school bills will be getting bigger and bigger and then there's Vivian and Basil—we must be careful—oh dear oh dear I wish you hadn't had to go away like this—I miss you a great deal more than I thought I should—I hope you won't have to have an 'after-cure.' Couldn't you rest quite as well at Wimbledon—ask Doctor—I can't read his name. I didn't after all write to the office to ask for wine to be sent to Bude because of the expense—I like water quite as much—I daresay it's better for me. I find it very provoking that the Bude train doesn't stop at Wimble-

don—it's so inconvenient going up to Waterloo and it costs so much extra." There were several pages in the same strain and the letter ended with a postscript: "Vivian has been very rude to Miss Pittard and directly she's finished your letter she's going to bed—I think that she will have to go to a boarding-school if she doesn't learn to behave better. I heard of a very good one the other day from Mrs Brett Jones—I went to see her to explain why we couldn't dine there—of course I'd written too."

The third letter was not a letter at all. It was a bulky envelope, was from Gerard's bank and contained his pass-book. He had sent it in on the eve of his departure with a request that it should be made up to the end of the week and then sent to him at Aix. He had no reason to look at it with misgiving. Within a few pounds, and on the assumption that all the cheques he had written had already been their brief round, he knew what it would disclose. He was one of those unusual people to whom the keeping of a respectable balance was a settled habit. He had always lived within his income. Money would accumulate in his account until the end of the year; then he would invest it in a lump. Just now he had some cause to be pleased with the state of his finances. His last purchase had been of London General Omnibus Shares and their rise had been more than ordinarily satisfactory. His broker was to be thanked for that. Gerard was no reader of the financial press. He was content to do what he was told. Well, it was a good thing to have no worries about money. This visit to Aix would cost something, but he could

afford it, and there was no excuse for anxiety in these recent and unforeseen expenditures. Why shouldn't he enjoy himself for once in a way? He couldn't embarrass his affairs in the fortnight that remained of his visit. If necessary he could make up for it when he got back. But to stop here about a month and to refuse to join in the life of the place and to return without having made the most of the experience—why, it would be ridiculous. . . .

He dragged himself out of bed and disengaged his writing-case from the pile of clothes with which it was covered. Getting back to bed he wrote at once:

“MY DEAR ILONA: It is such a beautiful day that I think you and I ought both of us to make the most of it. You say you like motoring. Won't you come out with me? I'm going to mark this letter ‘urgent’ so that it may reach you at once. Forgive me, please, if you wanted to go on sleeping. But what I thought was that we might motor up to La Chambotte. My guide-book says it's a ‘*site ravissant*,’ whatever that may mean, and we can lunch there—if only you'll be ready to start at twelve o'clock. You've got time, you know! But perhaps your English ‘friend’ has found you and you're engaged. I hope not though. We'd meet at the station—*à la gare*—at 12.5. Please send me an answer by the bearer. Yours very”—how should he end?—“Yours very sincerely,

“G. BLUNDELL.”

The addressing of the envelope presented difficulties. He didn't know the girl's name. He supposed that “Mademoiselle Ilona” would do. It would have to. He rang for a *chasseur*. But if he sent a boy from the

hotel the little affair would be everybody's property. He didn't suppose that the porter would fail to imagine a great deal into a letter that was going to the Piccadilly. Perhaps after all he had better give the idea up. He looked at his clock. There was not time for him to dress and to go down into the streets and to send some casually picked-up messenger. No, he would not give it up! He'd have to use the *chasseur*. He bade the boy wait while he wrote a second note—to his partner, Mathews. It was necessary to have another errand to cloak the boy's visit to the Piccadilly. He had heard that you could buy the discretion of such menials. An excuse for his letter to Mathews? Would they send at once to Bude a case of half bottles of 1910 Graacher? . . . But that was ridiculous. Why should he send a special messenger to the post-office with a letter that couldn't anyhow leave Aix till the evening? It didn't look convincing. He must invent a further pretext. There was no one in the place to whom he could send a note. He knew Mr Champion, but he had no wish to write to him, and anyhow they shared the same roof. He must fall back on a telegram. The only person to whom he could telegraph was Mary. "Telegraph if arrived comfortably. Very well myself. Gerard."

"Now, my boy, look here. I want you to send this telegram and to get me a receipt for it, and to bring it to me directly you come back. No, wait a minute. The telegram will be two francs sixty and the receipt a sou, isn't it? Here's five francs. Tell the porter I want you to go to the post-office immediately, without any delay. No, don't be in such a hurry. There's something else.

It's a letter for the Piccadilly Restaurant. You know where that is? You can pass it on the way to the post. Leave the letter as you go down and say you'll call for an answer in five minutes, that it's important. Understand. Put it in your pocket. Say nothing to the porter about the letter, mind. I've a reason for that. The change out of the five francs you can keep for yourself. Now trot."

Gerard went back to bed. He could not know the result of his invitation for half an hour. Pontifex had told him he must go and lunch at La Chambotte, but he was very well aware that both La Chambotte and the beautiful day were merely excuses, that the real reason for the excursion was his wish to see Illona again, to spend a day with her in the sun, away from the crowds of Aix. . . . Within limits he was quite honest with himself.

The boy was something like a *chasseur*. He was back in less than half an hour:

"Here, Monsieur, is the receipt, and the message from the Piccadilly is that Mademoiselle will meet you."

CHAPTER XII

GERARD had to find a car for himself. In any ordinary circumstances—if he had been taking Mrs and Miss Goddard out for the day for instance—he would have ordered one through the hotel porter without question. But things being as they were he thought he had better keep the fact of his excursion as much as possible to himself. Hurrying his dressing he went downstairs and promptly ran against Mr Champion in the hall.

“Don’t you think this would be the very day for a jaunt, Blundell?”

The horrid little man progresses in intimacy, Gerard thought, but he answered civilly enough that he was unfortunately engaged.

“Oh, that’s a pity—but we will go some time—eh? You’ve got friends here now, haven’t you? I saw you weren’t in to dinner last night—you came in pretty early all the same. Wonderful not to hear you coming home about four o’clock. You wake me up, you know—but I don’t mind. You’ll spoil your cure. Docteur Vignon wouldn’t let you behave like that, I can tell you. Going down the hill? I’ll walk

with you. Nothing like a little exercise before lunch, I always say."

Gerard had no choice but to allow this inconvenient companionship. He wondered whether he was to be forced into a friendship against his will. On the whole he thought that he was safe as long as he responded no more cheerfully than he had previously done. After all he was not of sufficient importance to make it likely that a tuft-hunter would insist on his capture. Shrewdly he supposed that Mr Champion would not lay nets beforehand, would not care to compromise himself by making plans ahead. It was still so early in the season. New guests were arriving at the hotel by every train. You couldn't tell what a day might produce in the way of interesting and important people. If he were once tied up as a companion to Gerard Blundell he might find it difficult to extricate himself. So, Gerard was convinced, Mr Champion reasoned, consciously or unconsciously; but in the meantime minutes were passing: he must get rid of him somehow or other; he must find a car. The little Englishman stuck to him. Evidently he looked on their walk as a constitutional. They were, he supposed, to stroll down and they were to take a turn and they were to stroll up. All the way he prattled—gossip, stupid gossip about the people in the hotel, about the noted or the scandalous visitors to Aix, about the King of Greece. Without quite realising what he was doing Gerard had chosen the road that led past the Piccadilly:

"Now that's a place I can't understand decent people going to." He paused for Gerard's reply.

"Why, have you ever been there? It's a restaurant, isn't it?"

"You can call it a restaurant if you like. I shouldn't. And I wouldn't go into it. I've heard what goes on there. It's a disgusting place."

"But what does go on?"

"Everyone knows it's shameful. I wonder the police allow it. There are some shocking tales. But anything's possible in France."

Gerard allowed the subject to drop. He felt that he had been prudent indeed in his attempt to keep the knowledge of his own interest in the place from his hotel porter. His companion would surely have heard of it, and then at once it would have been common property. But they were down now in front of the Hôtel de Ville.

"You must excuse me. I must go and find a barber; I have to get my hair cut before lunch."

"Oh, I can take you to the best man. I'll stroll round a bit while you're there and we'll walk up together."

"No, don't do that. I think I saw a place—along here. I must hurry. I'm not coming back to lunch anyway." Gerard darted off. His legs were longer than his persecutor's. He did get away.

And he did arrive at two minutes past twelve in front of the station in one of the cars of Monsieur Curvat, a car that he fancied even this Chisholm, unless he had brought one of his own from England, would be unable to surpass in comfort and apparent efficiency. Gerard was frankly sensitive on the point. Who, apart from his name and that he was in the army, the young

Englishman was, he had no idea, but certainly he had arrived in Aix a day late, several days late. That he had driven Illona about Paris, that he had danced with her night after night, gave him no claim on her time here in Savoy. Gerard reassured himself with the recollection that she had promised him that in the event of their clashing he should come first.

Now, no doubt, he would have to wait for several minutes. It was already the hour he had appointed. But Illona was punctual. He saw her coming. She drifted down the Avenue de la Gare in the same wind-swept manner that he had noticed yesterday. She was wearing the same clothes, the same hat. She wasn't smart. . . . But if she was not smart, also it was true that to his eyes at least she betrayed her profession not at all. The dancers, even the actresses, he had seen in London, that he had lunched next to at Romano's or the Imperial, too often gave themselves away. They looked, even if they were not, more than a little disreputable—disreputable and raffish and dowdy. There was nothing cared-for about their appearance. If they wore lace it was seldom fresh; their skirts hung just as they should not; colours clashed; they seemed to have started on their career of pleasing without thought; they were amateurs. This Illona was certainly not dowdy, but equally she was not disreputable. She didn't look rich; she looked forlorn. He need never regret that she was with him. . . .

"I'm punctual to-day. You were angry at being kept waiting yesterday: I saw. I'm sleepy a little. *Quel culot* to wake me up, I said, when I saw your note. I almost threw the maid into the passage. I didn't know it was

from you of course. I like your handwriting. But you didn't give me much time. I'll tell you the truth. I'm only punctual by accident: the coiffeur wasn't ready for me, so I didn't wait for him. You mustn't look at my hair."

"Why, you don't go to the coiffeur every day, do you?"

"Of course I do. Often twice. Always twice when I'm going out. I've got to—I've so much hair and it flies about when I dance. But I didn't know to-day that I was going out in time to make sure that he'd be free."

"And is all that hair your own? Oh, I know it is: I've seen it down—that first night I came."

"I didn't have it down last night. I shan't again. It makes me look too young. I don't like that. I'm not a *gosse, moi*. I'm a woman. I'm twenty-two. Yesterday I wore my Russian dress. Like a boy, you know, with high boots and bare knees. I danced my Russian dance. I had a success. Look, I made quite a lot of money." She opened her bag and took out a metal purse and showed what it contained—a note, for a hundred francs apparently, and some half dozen louis.

"You did well—nearly ten pounds."

"I had more than that. I gave the *femme de chambre* ten francs—Piaci doesn't pay her anything either—and I owed the coiffeur thirty francs and I paid him."

"You owed the coiffeur thirty francs! Why, you've only been here four or five nights."

"Of course. He costs dear although we pay artists' prices. I've been here a week—yes, a week to-day—and I paid him fifty francs the other day. I left Paris so

quickly that I brought nothing with me, and I had to buy powder, cream, everything."

"Anyhow you've still got about twelve louis there. I don't make twelve louis a day, I can tell you."

"*Blague*, my dear. But I work hard, you know. I danced all the time nearly till six o'clock this morning."

"But you sat down with all your nice friends."

"Yes, but they wouldn't let me sit down long. It wasn't for nothing though. I'd like the same people to come back every day. They were two Germans. Rather nice, one of them. The other was old, fat, a regular beer-brewer. He tried to make love to me. I didn't like that, so I called Lucy to sit on the table. She doesn't mind what they do. And she's made no money since she's been here. I made him give her three louis at once; I said she wanted it. Afterwards he gave her some more. He got quite drunk and paid for champagne for everyone, for the band, for the other dancers. When he went away the young one had to help him out. How *Piaci* laughed! His bill was nearly a thousand francs. I'd have made more myself if I'd stayed on their table, but I went away when he got drunk—and then what do you think happened? At four o'clock Ernest came: you know that boy we saw last night; he came with his two friends. They'd been playing in the Casino. So I went to their table. He wanted me to go out to-day. I said I couldn't, that I was too tired. He asked who you were. So I told him you were a very old friend of mine. It wasn't his business. I don't tell everyone all they want to know. But look, you take care of this purse for me, *hein?* I may lose it."

Gerard took the purse and put it away in an inside

pocket. He was moved that she should trust him in this way. He looked at her. Already the wind had brought a new colour to her cheeks; he thought she might be cold.

"There's so much wind; you'd better have my scarf. No, I wouldn't wear it anyway."

She protested again, but he wound it round her neck.

"Yes, it is cold," she said, and held out her hands for him to touch. They were chill. For a moment he enclosed them in his own. She looked happily at him, and seemed to press closer to his side, almost as a child might. They drove on in silence.



CHAPTER XIII

SOON Gerard had to lessen the chauffeur's zeal. He was not an habitual motorist; the speed of the Continental driver seemed to him beyond safety; he had no wish to appear in the London papers as the victim of a motor-car accident. Whether it left him alive or dead the circumstances would be equally difficult to explain away. And there was no need for hurry. They had the day before them. Then quite consciously he determined to put London and his home out of his thoughts for a few hours. This was a holiday. For a brief space he had escaped from his ordinary world. He would make the most of it. . . .

From a sky clear save for a few white and happy clouds the sun beat down on that landscape of mountain and field, village and vineyard, that is the glory of Savoy. The car had passed the mean streets and desultory houses that mark the outskirts of Aix. They were running through an avenue of trees, under the tunnel of their widespread branches. Gerard turned a little and looked at his companion. Her face was still, still as a sculptor's marble. She seemed not to notice his regard. From under her small black hat her hair escaped in untidy

waves. Her skin was flushed ; her lips, curled and salient, not meek and suppressed as is the occidental way, were warmly red. She whose life was spent under the hard light of electric globes was for the moment a creature of the sunlight. Her beauty seemed to unfold, to become more vivid under his eyes. He had compared her before to the other women he had known ! How much more vital she was, how much more natural. She hid nothing. She was primitive, real. What was it that attracted him ? It was not as if he had seen much of her. They had talked for three or four broken hours, but only about the ordinary commonplaces of her life. Was she beautiful ? Her mouth was beautiful and her skin and her curved eyebrows and long lashes, her green-brown eyes, and the sad, brooding melancholy of her gaze.

“ Illona.”

“ Well ? ”

“ You don’t regret that English boy ? I’d like to be certain that you wouldn’t rather have been with him. Where did he want to take you ? ”

“ My dear, if I had wanted to go with him be sure I would have gone. Truly, though, even if I had given him my promise last night I would have sent to him to let me off this morning—for you. Where were we going ? To the Lake of Annecy, he said, to some village on the other side. I go with him, perhaps to-morrow, *hein ?* Perhaps not. *Nous verrons.* To-day is enough now. I’m very happy.”

“ That pleases me, but I’m jealous of your English boy ; don’t let’s talk about him.”

"You jealous! You don't know how to be jealous. I don't know you very well, but I know that much. It doesn't matter. We won't talk of him. I think only of you to-day—just for four hours. You'll be tired of me then."

"No, Illona, I'll never be tired of you while you talk to me, and while you look like that with your cheeks pink like a child's, and your hair flying in the wind. Do you know how pretty you are?"

"Me—pretty!" She laughed. "I'm not pretty, my dear. Sybil is pretty. But it's right you should like me for to-day. I like you."

"Like—that's a poor word. What French word would you use?"

"How do you mean? *Je vous aime*, I think."

"Yes, that's what I meant. But '*Je vous aime*' is nothing. *Vous aimez* the motor-car or the mountains. *Je vous aime*, but I like also the waiter who brings me my breakfast; *j'aime* this chauffeur."

Illona burst into laughter. "Oh, you do amuse me. What would you have me say? *Je t'aime*?" She laughed again. "No, that would be too much—too much for to-day. Besides it wouldn't be true. I'll say *je vous aime bien*, if you like." Looking at him she added: "Mostly you amuse me; yes, that's it; even you interest me a little. *Voilà tout!* To-morrow it will be another—another for me, another for you. Your friends will perhaps arrive to-morrow, and then you'll have no time for me. Now let us look at the country. All this is new to me. I want to see."

But Gerard had no eyes for the little villages they

were passing, for the fields of corn, the vines. He looked only at his companion. Soon they began to climb up and up over a road too rough for ordinary driving, tortuous, a little dangerous. The strange country scenes would at any other time have interested him. Now he watched only the effect they had on the girl at his side, to whom they were as curious as they were to him. "Look, look!" she would cry out, and he would try to see what had attracted her. Soon she was not content with turning from this side to that. She must stand on the seat looking out over the windscreen or from the back of the car into the valley. At a sudden curve of the road nearly she was thrown over the side. "Put your hand on my shoulder," Gerard told her. He thrilled under her touch, and suddenly and frankly he realised all that she might be to him, all that perhaps she would be to him. He knew that he desired her as he had never desired anything in his life; he knew, and knowing, confessed to himself. Unconsciously he shook his head and bit his underlip. Did what he was thinking count as a sin? he asked himself. Did anything but happiness count to-day under this sun, amid these hills?

And then of a sudden they had reached the brow of the mountain and the car had pulled up at the not very imposing gate of the little "hotel-restaurant" which crowns the height. Here too the season had not begun. No other car, no other visitor, was to be seen.

"Say, tell the chauffeur he's to have his lunch," Illona prompted Gerard, and then together they went across the terrace, through the narrow eating-room of

the building on to a further terrace, almost a balcony, beyond. . . .

"Oh, how it is beautiful! . . . Don't talk to me ; let me look at it."

Gerard drew his breath. He was content not to speak. The waiter who had shown them the way, used perhaps to the effect of the scene on the visitor who saw it for the first time, had left them alone. They were both leaning over the iron rail that served as a protection from the precipice that dropped almost sheer to the ground three thousand feet below. Lac du Bourget lay beneath them, stretching irregularly its length between the high mountains that it gave back from its smooth surface as from a mirror. Polished and blue, the water had no flaw on its broad surface, but here and again it was fretted with the breeze from the shore ; a single sailing boat left a wake hardly perceptible ; the clear enamel colour was shaded by the milk of the clouds. Illona stood motionless. Gerard was on the point of speaking but looking at her he refrained from breaking in on her silence. He wondered what she was thinking or whether her mind was simply absorbed by the beauty of what she saw. He waited for her to move. . . . Her young, lithe figure, poised so lightly on its feet, was silhouetted against the mountains, against the silver grey of the rocks, against the woods which clung like moss to the steep sides of the lower hills. In this sun, in this tonic air, each minute that passed was something strangely remote from life as he had known it. An ecstasy bathed the seconds, and this young girl was a symbol of an ever to be remembered joy.

The waiter came for his orders. Gerard asked for an early *déjeuner*. It would be ready, he was told, in half an hour.

Illona had turned. She came towards him and took his hand. "My dear, this is the most beautiful place I have ever seen. I may forget the others; now I shall never forget you, because you brought me here. But let us go down. We have half an hour. I want to see more. Everything is beautiful."

A flight of steps led to an untidy garden that merged untidily into the wild ground that bordered the edge of the rocks. On one of its stones a lizard lay sunning itself. As they went down Illona saw it :

"Quick, look! What is that? *Une salamandre*? I must catch it." And she was off, darting here and there like a child, with all a child's eager curiosity and foolish zeal. Then a butterfly, and quickly she ran, throwing her hat in a vain attempt to put an end to its flight. Gerard followed her slowly, laughing to himself, laughing at her, laughing in sheer happiness. . . . The half-hour passed too quickly.

The air, the lunch, the wine—the Scyssel of the countryside—and perhaps in particular two slices of a veritable Scotch currant cake which came unexpectedly before the coffee and which the waiter accounted for on the ground that the *patronne*, his mother, was a true Scotchwoman, combined to make Gerard a little sleepy, a little disinclined for further exploration. And yet he had no wish to return at once to Aix. His hotel, sanity, his ordinary life, were an hour away. He would postpone his return to them as long as he could. Illona retained still her

mood of energy. She would have him look out over the full blue lake that seemed to threaten to overflow its banks. "You'll take me out one day in a sailing boat like that, *hein?* And see the train down there. It's like a snail. How slow it goes! And that auto. I could drop a stone on them if I tried. The lake looks as if it is splashed with ink."

Once more she dragged him down to the garden. They must go, she said, to that spur of rock that hung over the road. The way proved more difficult than she thought. There were fences to climb, a wire, and gullies of tumbling stones. Suddenly a high heel gave way beneath her and she fell headlong. Quickly Gerard helped her to her feet.

"Yes, I'm hurt—my finger: *ça fait mal . . . o-oh, ça fait bobo!*"

For a moment he thought she would faint. The colour faded from her cheeks. "Sit down," he said, and she slipped down beside him. They could have chosen no worse place. The stones were loose, the ground sloped away. He put out his arm to support her. She nestled against him as if it were her right. His arm closed round her waist, and her uncovered head drooped to his shoulder.

For a moment Gerard was seized by panic. Had she fainted? Perhaps more than her finger was hurt. He could feel under his arm, under his hand, her soft respiration. No woman had ever lost consciousness in his presence before. Should he run for help? But how could he? How could he account for the place in which they were? How could assistance come to them in this crevice among the rocks?

Perfectly still, save for the slight movement of her breath the girl's slim body pressed against his own. He could feel its warmth. Surely she was only faint from the shock and from the pain. His anxiety passed. He looked down at her length. Her face was turned from him, but one ear and all the glory of her hair, brown, gleaming and rippling to disorder, was beneath his eyes and just the beginning of her forehead, the line of her body too, the curves of her waist and of her hip, the longer line of her leg, and her foot in its black stocking and stupid useless shoe. Hardly he refrained from bringing his other arm round beneath her breast the more surely to support her. An infinite tenderness surged through him. Poor child, so dear, so alone, so fragrant and perhaps so lost. Was there anything he could do to keep her from further harm? He inclined his head and kissed her hair softly, so softly that perhaps even if she were conscious she would hardly feel his lips. Through all the figure that he held he felt a shiver run, a thrill. Then a sigh, a moan, and again absolute stillness. . . .

Gerard tightened the arm that held the girl, that held her from slipping down on the loose stones to the bushes a few feet below. Once more he bent his head and pressed his lips against her hair, rubbing his cheek tenderly, caressingly, amid its soft folds. Clearly she knew. As a cat purrs she drew her breath through her lips and pressed more closely to him. Then he did bring his other arm to her support, clasping his hands together, holding her tightly to him. His cheek, his mouth, lay upon her hair. Its scent, her scent, crept

through his being like an intoxication. Still further he bent and kissed her ear, her temple, the corner of her forehead, quietly but without restraint. Then suddenly he felt her tremble and draw away. With the fingers of one hand and with the hand closed that she had hurt she pushed him from her. For a moment she looked into his face, strangely, hungrily almost, as if in search of some secret that evaded discovery. Then she jumped to her feet and before he could catch her was out of his reach. Quickly he followed her.

“Illona——”

“My dear, don’t talk to me. *Laisse moi tranquille, je t’en prie.* Why did you do that? No, I’d rather not be told: I don’t want you to lie to me. I want to go back now, quickly, quickly.”

CHAPTER XIV

THEY had left the steeper part of their descent behind them before Illona spoke again.

Hurriedly making her way to the terrace of the little hotel she stood impatiently while the waiter brought the bill and while the car was being sent for. Then when all was ready she delayed their departure for more than a minute while she leant over the iron rail and looked out over the lake, motionless, absorbed in her own thoughts. Gerard forbore to interrupt her. He was at a loss. Something he knew had happened, something more than he realised. What he had done he regretted not at all, but what should he do now? What was there for him to do? He had kissed her. Was that so great a sin? He smiled grimly, remembering what he had seen at the Piccadilly and remembering a score of sentences from her talk. But he had kissed her more than once. The proper time for her anger was when he had first pressed his lips to her hair. Then she had shivered closer to his side. Her outburst had been slow in coming. At present he could only see her back. Perhaps if he could see her face, her eyes, he would be able to understand. Perhaps. He

shrugged his shoulders and was immediately ashamed of the gesture: it was insincere. He did care. Still he could feel her soft hair, her warm flesh on his lips; still the fragrance of her being was in his memory. Even if now she was lost to him for ever he could hardly find room in his heart for regret at what had happened in those moments that, passing so quickly, had brought him such an ecstasy of delight.

These thoughts pursued him as the car wheeled and twisted down the mountain side. Illona kept her face averted. For a moment he thought she might be crying. One of her hands lay on the rug, the hand she had hurt. The pain could have been no trifle. One nail was torn and blue, and the skin of her knuckles was bruised and red. Should he take the hand and hold it in his own? Or would it be wiser, safer, to wait, to allow her anger, her resentment, to run its course? The opportunity passed, for now with both hands she was rolling and unrolling, folding and unfolding, her handkerchief. Once and again she would start as if her whole body was being racked.

So the kilometres reeled themselves away. Nearly were they in Aix before she turned:

"I wanted to send my mother a postal-card from there, and to buy some for myself. How can I get them?"

"I'll look in the town. The shops are sure to have some. Then I'll bring them to you. If not, we'll go up again one day, eh?"

"No, I'll never go up again—not with you, not with anyone. And *écoutez*: if you find the cards you can send

them to me. I don't want you to bring them. I don't want you to come ever again to the Piccadilly."

"But, Illona, how then shall I be able to see you dance? I must see that again."

"*Jamais, jamais.* I don't wish you to see me dance. No, I forbid you to come. Then perhaps I won't see you. It's better—yes, indeed."

"Illona, I must see you again——"

"There isn't any must. I wish not. Perhaps, oh yes, perhaps I shall change. I think not, though. Now stop the man: I want to walk a little; I don't want to drive into Aix with you." She signalled to the chauffeur herself.

"But let me get out of the car and walk with you."

"No." She spoke with angry decision. "No, I will be alone. Good-bye."

"I won't say 'Good-bye.' I'll only say 'Au revoir.' You taught me that. Illona, I must see you again; I must see you to-night. Please, please, come to Nikola's to dinner. I want you to so much."

She laughed harshly. "For how long? No, I won't have dinner with you. Once was enough——"

"But last night you said you wanted me to ask you again."

"Last night! Last night is gone, my dear. I've said it: I won't come. Now let me go."

"I've done something stupid. I know that much, although I don't know what it was. You'll forgive me, Illona. Please, dear, do. Please forgive me. Perhaps you'll change your mind. I'll wait for you in the same

place, where I waited last night. 'I shall hope you will come.'

"It's no use: I won't be there. You'll only wait for nothing. And you did nothing stupid. It was my fault. But now good-bye." This time Gerard could not keep her.

Back in his room at the hotel, Gerard had first to read the letters that had arrived for him and then to answer them. Certainly he had made a mess of things, he thought to himself, as he stared at the sheet of paper on which he had begun to write to his wife. He had given away his "ancient wisdom and austere control" for nothing. He had even sinned. Good heavens, yes! He had plunged in just about as deeply as he could without going in over his head. And what for? What remained now? Chagrin and anger and desire and, yes, love confessed and unsatisfied and insistent. Something had happened. He was sure that Illona wasn't merely playing with him. In what she said she had been sincere. Truly she didn't intend to see him again. It wasn't that she disliked him. Even now he could feel her in his arms, pressing closer to his side with every caress of his lips until suddenly she had torn herself away from him. What had he done? What had he left undone? What could he do now? Write to her? His courage winced at going in spite of her wish to search for her at the Piccadilly. He would find her with other friends. She might refuse even to speak to him. He had already, he felt, made himself conspicuous enough. Yes, he would have to write. After all there remained not so many days.

One week out of three had gone. But even if months remained he had so little time. At the mere thought of her spending her day, her evenings, with one or other of the many men whom apparently her beauty attracted to the Piccadilly, even of her carrying out with this man Chisholm that plan of an excursion to Annecy, every jealous instinct of which his nature was capable had surged angrily into his brain. He saw her with the young Englishman flying along those broad roads, nestling to his side, talking to him, laughing with him. Chisholm made love to her a little, she had said: "I'd like him to make love to me." He would prevent that somehow. Yes, he would go early that night to the Piccadilly and he'd compel her to stop with him. She should hardly dance. He would propitiate the scoundrel who kept the place. And he would make his peace with her. She should forgive him whatever he had done to offend her. It could not be so serious. . . . Now he must finish his letter. After that he could lie down for a while and read before dressing. He had a long dull evening before him and a long night, for he would not leave the Piccadilly until everyone else had gone.

All the first part of his programme he carried out. Still he found himself out of sympathy with Mr Gilbert Gannan and he slept a little until the maid bringing hot water at half-past seven awakened him. Hard on her heels came a *chasseur*. There was a telephone message for Monsieur. It came from the Grand-Café. Monsieur would understand the message, he had been told. He was simply to say that Mademoiselle would dine with Monsieur that evening at a quarter-past eight.

CHAPTER XV

GERARD hardly arrived in time and when he did arrive a carriage already awaited him. He was a little shy; he wondered whether he should refer to what had passed. Illona took his hand and held it in hers for longer than was necessary for any purpose of greeting—not for very long though, for the night was fine and the hood was down, and they were riding through the streets for all the world to see, but long enough for him to realise that he had been taken back into favour.

A minute's drive carried them to the restaurant. They were received as old clients; they were given at once the table they had occupied overnight; Illona was wearing the same dress. Nothing in their surroundings was altered. But in his own heart, Gerard knew, everything had changed. Then for the first time he realised that his companion had not spoken since he had found her. He looked enquiry.

“Don't look at me, my dear: I dressed in such a hurry. And I'm wearing the same dress. To tell you the truth it's the only one I have here. I've lots in Paris. I'm rather ashamed. I must make some money and get another quickly, several others.”

It was on the tip of Gerard's tongue to say that he would like to give her one. His hesitation, he felt, was absurd. Why indeed shouldn't he buy her a dress, a dozen dresses? He'd given her money; surely he could give her clothes if he chose. But something restrained him. At least here, away from the Piccadilly and when she was with him alone, this girl had not the air of inviting gifts. To-night more than ever she seemed remote from the life in which he had first seen her. And she seemed remote from either of her chief moods of the day. Her gaiety had left no trace, nor her anger. There was something sad and appealing about her; somehow she made him feel that she was throwing herself on his mercy. She spoke hardly at all. When he addressed her she answered in the briefest way, looking up at him shyly as if fearful of what might follow. It would, he confessed to himself, have been a dull dinner if he had not been able to watch her face, and now and again to surprise her eyes, sombre, clouded as if a storm had passed.

They had finished their coffee: it was only half-past nine. Not for another hour would she have to be back at her work. Her work! He pictured to himself the long hours that were to come. Perhaps she would be dressed in the costume she had described—"like a boy, you know, with high boots and bare knees." . . . He saw her sitting intimately with German "beer-brewers" and, with an even keener jealousy, he saw her circling the hall in the arms of that Chisholm to whose unconscious influence he felt vaguely he could attribute her strange conduct of the afternoon. For a moment he had wild ideas of taking

some extreme step which would, at least for this one night, make her return to the Piccadilly an impossibility. But what step could he take? And what good would he do? And at the back of his mind, unconfessed but potent against action, lay the fear of scandal and the even greater fear of what would follow—the fear of people talking, of the gossip of her *camarades*, of that Italian devil Piaci's understanding smile.

"Illona, is it absolutely necessary for you to dance to-night? Couldn't you say you were ill, or couldn't you have just this one day as a holiday?"

"You are stupid, my dear: of course I must dance. There would be an *amende* of fifty francs at least if I stopped away: and even then I couldn't do it. But why—why do you ask?"

"I don't know, Illona. I only know I don't want you to dance to-night. You've been all day with me——"

"You mustn't get sentimental, my dear. I've been all day with you so I mustn't dance! I don't understand that. Are you so fine that I mustn't be with anyone else after a few hours with you? *Zut alors!*"

"No, that's not what I mean, but all these hours I've been watching you and I've had you all to myself and——"

She leant back in her chair and laughed and laughed, —laughed quietly, of course, but laughed all the same. Gerard looked at her and wondered, and was infinitely nettled and felt that she was making a fool of him. He did not see her eyes.

"I seem to amuse you. May I ask why?" He was a little pompous.

She laughed again: "My dear, you are jealous! I like that. Jealous, that's what you are. It's no use, you know. It's no use being jealous of me. I always do what I please. But continue. Be jealous. It amuses me. It gives me pleasure."

He looked at her still. He had command of his thoughts. Was it true that he was jealous? How could it be? What right had he? But then what right had she to laugh at him, to play with him? Yes, he did love her, but she could not know that. Surely he had kept his secret. He had kissed her, yes: but a kiss, several kisses—after all, what were they in her world, or for the matter of that in any world?

"No, Illona, I'm not jealous. I wouldn't dare to be jealous. But—well, all the same I do wish you were going to be with me till the end of the day. I'd like to feel that I'd had you for myself."

"That's impossible, my dear—but it's still early. Look: I've got a whole hour before I need be back. I don't want to stop here. It's so hot. Take me for a drive. Let us go as far as the lake. I have time."

Gerard fired at the idea. He called for the bill and in less than five minutes they were on the pavement waiting for one of the fast Aix carriages. The sky was of a velvet blue, stars sprinkled the darkness, the trees shone green in the light of the lamps. The night was made for danger. Illona leant on his arm. He looked down at her and smiled into her eyes. "Are you cold?" he asked. "Are you sure you won't be cold?"

"No, no, I love the night air when it's warm. But,

say, tell them to put up the hood. I must guard my hair. Don't forget I have to dance, my dear."

They were driving now. The brighter streets of Aix were behind them. The hood of the carriage hid them from the world. Gerard could see nothing of his companion but he could feel the length of her body against his own. The rug held them intimately together. He thought he could hear her breathe.

"Yes?" It was Illona who spoke.

"I didn't say anything. Are you sure you are comfortable?"

"Yes, yes, so, so comfortable, my dear." She pressed closer to him. For a moment he kept himself back, and then, then suddenly his desire was too great for him. He had meant so differently, but his hand searched for hers and found it. Her hand was warm. It seemed to welcome him. His other hand crept round her shoulder. She leant still closer and her head fell to the hollow of his arm. He held her to him tightly, and when he felt that with her free arm she too was holding him, all his prudence fled. He bent to her lips and kissed them. For one minute they clung together. Everything fell away from his thoughts save that he loved her, that she was here with him, in his arms.

The carriage stopped. . . Gerard looked out, cursing in his heart. They had come to the level-crossing of the railway. The barrier went up and they were off again. She nestled back to his breast. "*Comme je suis heureuse,*" she murmured.

"*Moi aussi.*" Gerard's French carried him thus far even in this moment of emotion. They were so alone in

the darkness. A light here and there in the villa windows told them that the world was not asleep. Their horses went as no hired English horses go. The discreet driver, used perhaps to the ways of lovers, had never shown them his face.

Their pace slackened. They were approaching the Grand-Port. "Stop, and then wait for a few minutes," Gerard said to the man; and then to Illona: "Come, let us walk a little."

"*Si tu veux*," she answered, and he took her arm with his and held her bare hand, caressing it as they walked. Slowly they made their way to the pier, where they could see small craft riding at anchor and the water splashed by the feeble lights of the harbour and of the boats. Soon they could go no further. They stood looking out on to the lake, peering into the mystery of its soft blackness. On the opposite shore they could discern nothing, but the mountains cut the sky, making themselves clear through no quality, no light and shade of their own, but by reason of the stars they hid.

"Illona, tell me: do you still only 'like' me? I do more than like you, you know."

With an action feline rather than human she pressed and rubbed herself against his side. "No, my dear, I'll say now, '*Je t'aime—je t'aime beaucoup*.' Truly you are different from the others. But *you* tell me."

For answer Gerard found her lips again with his own. The moment held his whole life. Here in the darkness were gathered up all the years that had been and all that were to come. He thought only of the girl by his side.

"Oh, Illona, I love you. Now I know what love is."

"My dear, my dear one, *chéri à moi!* You make me so happy when you say that. I want to believe it; I do believe it. Please be kind to me while you are here. I want kindness, *tu sais.*"

"Sweetheart, I will be as kind as you will let me be. Oh, but I wish you need not dance! Tell me, must you? If you can't get out of it then I'll come with you and I'll stop all the night till everyone else has gone."

"Yes, I must go—and at once surely. What is the time?"

It was too dark to see the face of his watch. Gerard struck a match. In the brief minute of its light he saw that it was indeed time for Illona's departure, but he saw also her face and her eyes and the shining red of her lips. He drew her to him again. This time her lips sought his. She repaid his kisses with her own, such kisses as he had never known. Then suddenly she drew away from him.

"*Viens vite.* I mustn't be late. I hate to be late. But, yes, put your arm round me. *Garde moi un peu.*"

They were back in the carriage. She would not let him put his arm round her again. She lay contentedly against his shoulder holding his hand. "I want only your hand. *Dis moi;* I will see you again quickly—but when?"

"Sweetheart, Illona dear, we have time to make plans. I shall take you now to the Piccadilly door but I'll come back at eleven. You're ready then, you say. And you were right, dear: I am jealous. That's why I don't

want you to dance. You won't dance more than you can help—please. And every time you'll come back to me. Promise !”

“I will promise anything else, but I won't promise that. *Ecoute, mon chéri*. I won't have you come with me to the Piccadilly. I am forced to dance there. It is my life. You've seen me ; you know what I have to do. I don't want you to see me there again. I couldn't dance if you were there. I couldn't be natural.”

“But, Illona, I've told you: I am jealous, dear. You'll dance with everybody who wants you. Men get drunk there. They don't know what they do. I can't stand it. Why shouldn't you dance in the theatre? Surely you dance well enough?”

She laughed. “Well enough? I should think so. I have danced in the theatre, my dear. That life is worse. I'll tell you another day all about it. Not now. Hold my hand and understand a little. I must dance, but I won't dance with everyone. I'll be careful. I promise.”

“And you won't sit with that ‘beer-brewer’ or those Englishmen who were there the other night when I was?”

“I won't sit with that German. But I must be polite with the Englishmen. I've known them a long time, *tu sais*. Listen! I will keep myself for you. We see each other in the morning, say? I will think of you all the time even when I dance. Now I drive you to the Villa des Fleurs and I'll go alone to the Piccadilly. I prefer that.”

Gerard had no choice but to do as he was told. And indeed he did it without resentment. He thought that

he understood her reasons. They pleased, they flattered him. They gave him a sense of ownership.

"I understand, Illona. But you shall drop me at the end of your street. I don't want to spoil my memories of this night by going to the Cercle. I love you, and I shall go back to my room and I shall think of you till I fall asleep—and then I shall dream of you, sweetheart."

"Yes, do, and you shall tell me about it in the morning. And me, I'll be *bien sage*. Truly I will. And when do we meet? You haven't told me. But don't make it too early, you know. I won't go to bed till six for sure. I'd like to, but Piaci won't let me."

"Then we'll meet at the station again at eleven. That's not too early, is it?"

"Twelve is better. Even so, I'll only have six hours in bed!"

They were in the town again. "Kiss me once more," she said. "And now, good-night—good-night, Gerard."

CHAPTER XVI

THAT state of mind into which it had now pleased Nature to call Gerard Blundell evidently agreed with him. He had fallen asleep to the happy memories of his day ; he woke up fresh and in the best of spirits ; Docteur Ribot congratulated him on his steady pulse and his clear eyes. Within recent months he had often been conscious of his age ; to-day he felt no older than when he came down from Oxford. He whistled gaily to himself as he dressed in the morning sunlight. Perhaps the cure had effected this improvement in his spirits and in his sense of well-being. More likely, he thought, it was the fact that he was in love. For he was in love. He had given up attempting to conceal the truth from himself. He had even given up attempting to gloss over the facts of what he was doing with the ready assurance that a flirtation was no very great sin and that no sane person could strongly object to his amusing himself during these solitary weeks as long as he pulled himself up in time. He no longer gave any apprehensive thought to what might happen next. Continually he thought of Illona, conjured up her eyes set so deeply under her grave forehead, wished that he had her photo-

graph to solace his loneliness, determined that she should be taken here in Aix in the dress in which she had visited La Chambotte with him—yes, but the photographer should take one portrait at least in which her head should occupy most of the plate, and it shouldn't be worked on, the character shouldn't be stippled out of it: it should be her head simply, showing the contour, the delicate planes of her face, the sweep of her beautiful hair, the smouldering question of her eyes. He pulled himself up then and made a grimace at the looking-glass. He was becoming rather a fool. How was a photograph to show all these things? And what would he do with a photograph anyway? However much he loved, might come to love, her, he could hardly take it back to England with him, or, if he did, he couldn't put it framed on his dressing table. . . .

Coming downstairs at half-past eleven Gerard was brought back to earth and to the solid realities of life by encountering in the hall Mr Champion and Mrs and Miss Goddard. They might almost have been waiting for him. Very likely they were. All three of them were sitting under a "Carte Tarride," the very wall-map that he wanted to consult about Annecy and its lake. Mr Champion sprang up, enthusiastically cordial:

"My dear fellow, why weren't you here last night? You know you're beginning to neglect the hotel. Very wrong I call it. We had such jolly music. Miss Goddard sang and her mother played." And then, dropping his voice a little: "Mrs Goddard asked me to introduce you to her. This is a good opportunity. Come along."

Gerard pulled himself together. He had only minutes

to spare. It behoved him to be expeditious, but it was also necessary to be polite. He doubted whether Illona would be sympathetic to his excuses if he should keep her waiting; he knew that he could not postpone his introduction to Mrs Goddard. There passed through his mind very vaguely some old picture of a young man being torn between love and respectability. He had time to realise that he was thinking of David Garrick wavering between Comedy and Tragedy, and then he found himself smiling at Mrs Goddard and assuring her that he was the veritable son of that General Blundell with whom, he now learned for the first time, the Goddard family had been on terms of some intimacy years and years ago at Cheltenham while Gerard was still at school and Eileen Goddard was still unthought of.

"No, I never saw you, Mr Blundell, but your father used to talk about you. It seems so long ago! And to think that you are that little boy whose photograph he showed me. My husband and I liked General Blundell so much. We were with him for months together for two or three winters at the Hydro. Now you must let us see something of you. But perhaps you have lots of friends in Aix. I don't see you at meals very often. Mr Blundell might join us in some of our excursions, Eileen. Where did we say we'd go to next? Was it Annecy?"

Gerard, furious at being delayed, cursing in his heart, smiled pleasantly at the fountain of kindly talk which Mrs Goddard had become. "I am sure it will be jolly for me if I am allowed to join you one day. No, I hardly know anyone in Aix, but—but I have got an

appointment now unfortunately." He looked round at the hurrying clock. "I am afraid I must go. I am late already. I hope you'll let me talk to you again about my father, Mrs Goddard."

Almost running down the hill, since as luck would have it no carriage was hanging about the door of the hotel, Gerard reviewed his situation in the light of this new event. That Mrs Goddard had known his father and evidently wanted to cultivate his own acquaintance was more than a nuisance. Aix was a very small place. She would learn quickly of the existence of his wife; and she or the egregious Champion would be sure to see him with Illona in the course of the next day or two. Well, it couldn't be helped. She would indeed have reason for bringing into play that strange feminine habit of "putting two and two together." Anyhow, it was too late now to retrace his steps. He refused to look the possible complications in the face. The sun shone too brightly; the day promised too well; he would see Illona in a few minutes and all the hours till ten o'clock he would spend with her—and it would be the same to-morrow, and for days to come. For the moment the horizon of Gerard's future was bounded by the two weeks that yet remained of his visit to Aix.

When Illona arrived at the station there were still several minutes before the train for Annecy would start. She smiled gaily at him. "Come," he said, "we're going to Annecy. I'll get tickets and then we'll walk up and down a little; and I want an English paper."

"Annecy—*chiche!* But why tickets? We don't go in

the train surely? *Moi*, I hate the railway. I thought we'd go in the same auto as yesterday." She made a face of dissatisfaction, and took his arm affectionately: "We go in an auto, *dis*, Gerard! Then I shall have so much pleasure. No, Annecy's not far. Everyone goes there *en auto*. I'd be ill in the train. Always I am. Now we take a carriage and drive to the garage, eh?"

Gerard had not given up the idea of going by car without thought. His guide-book had shown him that an excursion to Annecy was a very different matter from a morning at La Chambotte and he had made a calculation of the likely expense. But neither by himself nor with any one of his friends would he have thought of going in any other way than by train. A car would be pleasanter of course, but he had taken it for granted that Illona would be content. After all the excursion was the chief thing and they would be as alone together in the train as in a car.

But in such matters Illona was not used to being denied. "I'm sure a car won't take any longer; and think: we don't want to go just to Annecy. It's a town, you know. I want to drive on round the lake—to a village called Talloires; and we can't go there by train. We'll lunch there—please, please!"

Gerard knew that if he had sense he would tell her frankly that the cost of going to Annecy in a car was more than he cared to spend, and that when they got there they would be able to go on to Talloires in one of the lake steamers; but he had not too much of that kind of wisdom at his disposal, nor had he the courage. His mind too had gone off at a tangent.

"Talloires—who told you about Talloires? I thought you had never been in this part of the world before."

"I haven't, dear. But I knew about it from the others." She blushed a little.

"What others?"

"From Sybil—no, that's not true. That English boy told me. He wanted to take me there yesterday, and asked me again last night. But I'm not going out with him at all, you know. I've told him so. He was furious." She laughed. "No, I won't go with him, and I won't go with anyone else while you're here. But it's getting late, *tu sais*. I'd rather stop in Aix than go in the train, truly."

And Gerard had to give way.

Of the beauty of the road to Annecy Gerard learned nothing. No sooner had they started than Illona slipped her hand into his and held it tight, and when they were clear of the town she nestled close to him, and with her eyes and with her questions and with her answers to his questions kept all his attention. There was no wind and no dust, and there were no clouds. To ride thus with this girl by his side was all that for the present at least he wished to ask of life.

As they approached Annecy he freed his hands to draw his guide-book from his pocket. Illona laughed at him :

"What do we want that book for? What do we want to see? We have each other. I only want you. No, I don't wish to stop. I like better the country, the real country where there are no houses. Tell him to go

straight on, round the lake. We needn't go as far as Talloires you know if we see another place we like."

Gerard was content, but he insisted on showing her the map. Such actual things appeared to interest her not at all. Her only answer was to laugh and to press closer into the hollow of his shoulder. But they were coming into the town and in a moment she drew herself away.

"I must behave now. You English are so careful—and so cold. But this isn't a big place; I'll soon come back again. I mustn't even look at you, I suppose. Now watch: I'll be very good. People will think I'm your sister."

But when they had left behind the flat meadows at the head of the lake the beauty and strangeness of the scene drew her eyes. The road runs by the side of the water and they looked across its blue and shining glory to the mountains which came down to the opposite shore. The villas and the little villages they passed were like the villas and villages of a child's play-box. Here and there boats were sailing or rode at anchor under frail piers from which slim ivory boys bathed, making splashes of diamonds as they dived, coming up to shake their heads and to call laughing to their friends. Gerard had told the chauffeur to go slowly, but almost as it seemed before they were clear of Annecy they were in sight of Talloires. Their road now led them inland and high up, and they came round a corner to look down on the lake and the little village and harbour clustered in the few acres that were left between the steepness of the mountains and the blue depths of the water.

"Let us send the car on and walk down," Gerard said, thinking how like the place was to those dream-villages pictured in the chromolithographs of his childhood.

"Is it far?" Illona asked, making a wry face. "Me, I like best to ride, but I'll walk for your sake. My feet get so quickly tired, you know."

"Your feet get tired! I remember you told me that before, but how does it happen? You dance and dance for hours together. Walking isn't worse than dancing."

"It is! When I walk I get tired at once. I never get tired when I dance. Dancing goes to my head. When I have someone I like to dance with and who can really dance I could go on and on till I died almost. I forget everything. It's my happiness, dancing. But walking—oh, that's different. My feet seem to get bruised."

The car had gone on, they could see it disappearing round the corner. Illona turned and looked up the road. They were alone. No sound broke the stillness save from some distant gully the falling of water. She took his arm, bending his elbow and holding his hand. Then she glanced up at him and smiled. He bent his head and kissed her.

"A—ah, I wanted that! You hadn't kissed me this morning, *tu sais: c'était pas gentil*. You should guess when I want to be kissed—but then perhaps I always want to be kissed—when I'm with you, I mean, my dear." . . .

Under green spreading trees they took their lunch, on little birds and fish from the lake which they could almost hear rippling at their side, so close it was. And

when they had finished their coffee Illona would not listen to their going back to the car. "Let him sleep, *pauvre gosse*," she said of the chauffeur; "he'll be tired after his work. We'll go down to the water or else up among the vines. I want to be alone with you—come, I'd like best by the lake."

So they went off, their hands clasped in the half concealment of his arm. They looked like lovers. Gerard had no cloud to his happiness. Illona's eyes shone. She tripped by his side rather than walked, glancing again and again up into his face, and laughing softly to herself as if for joy.

Access to the shore at Talloires is intermittent. To get to any part of it which was not already taken up by the grounds of the smiling, toy-like villas they had to pass between high flower-capped walls and before old gates that led to wildernesses of shrubs and to untidy fragrant gardens. Soon the walls and gardens gave place to vineyards and the shy path led them to the lake. Illona had forgotten her reluctance to walk. They went on in silence, hand in hand almost like children. Now and again they would come to a marsh or to some difficult place where a stream barred their easy progress, and after a little while they reached a stretch where apple trees sprinkled a meadow and where a couple of feet below the bank the waves rippled lazily on the pebbles and the fish played in the shallows, and where above their heads were clusters of that fruit whose very sight might well have brought the cold blood into Gerard's heart, and prudence to his head. Sun there was and shade and the lazy lake stretching

blue and almost unwrinkled before them. The old castle of Duingt was all that reminded them of man, save that from the distant road came occasionally the low hum of a motor or the sharp bark of its horn.

“We need not hurry, Gerard? I like it so, so much. I haven’t seen country like this before. I want to sit down just here where I can watch the fishes.” She had chosen a nook where the branches of an apple tree, fruit-laden, and vividly green against the deep blue of the sky, broke the sun into dappled shadows on the grass beneath. Through the leaves they could see towards the hills at the foot of the lake: vines and flowers and rushes shut off the world.



CHAPTER XVII

IT was the next morning. Gerard had forgotten to close his shutters overnight and he had awakened with a start at the moment that the hot sun had crept so far across the room that it fell on his head and shoulders. He looked at his watch. It was half-past five. The bath porters would not come for him for another hour. Illona—Illona was perhaps dancing still; her night's work not yet over, she would be spending her slim youth and her pale beauty in the foul air of that hall in which he had first seen her, in which she had said that he was never to see her again. His thoughts were intolerable to him, and the picture of what she might be doing now. She was his, his absolutely, and yet he seemed powerless to save her from a life in which, whether she were happy or sad, a success or a failure, the end must come so soon, a life in which during every single day she ate away a week of her health, her gay childishness, the glory of her straight young body. The smoke, champagne, the foul arms of men, their eyes, their jests—he shuddered in disgust. But no clear idea came into his mind. Vaguely he wondered whether she could not come to London to dance in some theatre. Surely she

would have a success there ; at least she danced as well as a dozen young women who had dancing parts and who presumably enjoyed salaries on which they could live decently.

He was to see her at mid-day. It now seemed quite natural that each day should be dedicated to the pursuit of their happiness. The thought of London and of his home intruded on him hardly at all. England was so far off, and the ten days that had passed since he had left The Haven, Acacia Road, seemed a lifetime. . . .

Gerard's ninth day in Aix was like to the day that came before it, and so were the days that followed. He did not neglect the first reason for his being in the place. It was not difficult to attend to the instructions of Docteur Ribot, for the details of his cure were carried out during the hours in which Illona slept behind the discreet green shutters of her so-called hotel ; and at night he went betimes to bed, caring for nothing once he had taken the girl to the corner of the street in which at half-past ten the Piccadilly was just beginning to hang out the scarlet and yellow signs of its midnight trade. Sometimes, in order to get time for a longer excursion, they would meet a little earlier, but generally they met at mid-day, and then they would remain together for half a score of hours, lost in a happiness which he at least had never known before, the possibility of which indeed he had never suspected. She gave herself to him so wholly. She was his with no reserve. His was her body and every secret of her mind. For hours together she would talk of the life she had led in that empty time before she had

known him. Holding his hand, or nestling into the hollow of his shoulder, she would answer every question that he chose to ask with a frankness that would have been cynical if it had not proved itself to him again and again to be entirely simple. She had done a great deal, had suffered a great deal, in her short life and she seemed to regret none of it. "*Penses-tu!*" she exclaimed when he asked her if she was not sorry that things had turned out as they had. "It is fate. Besides I've not really been unhappy. I have had a great deal of fun. I only regret that I didn't know you earlier, Gerard—yes, four years and a half ago. Then—then perhaps things might have been different."

She wrenched herself from his arm and turned so as to be able to examine his face. For what seemed a long time she looked into his eyes, with her own eyes contracted as if in pain or doubt. Tears came to mar their beauty but remained unshed. The mood was a short one. Generally she was gay, light-hearted as one of those butterflies whose flight in the sun she never tired of following, and she returned quickly to gaiety now.

"How many more days have we to be happy together? Eight. Oh, that is a long time. And you have no friends to take you away from me? Each day is to be all mine?"

Gerard reassured her, but his heart misgave him. He remembered the Goddards and their friendship for his father, and their wish that he should spend a day with them. That was nearly a week ago. He had seen them since but only to bow and in effect incontinently to flee. Surely they must think him very rude; indeed already he fancied that Mrs Goddard observed him with a colder

eye, greeted him with a less cordial smile. And the worst of it was that now she had found him she was little likely entirely to let him go. Whether she had actually seen him with Illona he did not know. It was not improbable. They lunched and dined, they even went to the Villa together, with absolute carelessness. One slips into these things. Champion certainly had seen him—Champion, that respectable little worm who wondered that such a place as the Piccadilly was allowed to exist. They had met him one day on the Mont-Revard railway. Their train was on the way up, his on the way down. They passed at Pré-Japert. Gerard and Illona were seated alone on the open bench right at the back of their train, and Champion was in the corresponding position in the front of his. The two carriages stopped exactly opposite one another. Gerard was too much occupied in his conversation with his companion to pay any attention to his surroundings, but just as his train started he looked up and saw Champion's eye fixed on him. Often afterwards he wondered what he had done, to what extent he had betrayed his embarrassment. Almost without attempt at concealment he had been holding Illona's hand. Had he snatched his own away? Or had he raised it naturally and quietly to salute his fellow-guest? He knew that Champion had looked awkward. "Hullo, how are you?" he had said, and Champion had screwed up his eyes self-consciously. Afterwards, when next morning they met in the hall of their hotel, his persecutor had certainly carried himself in a knowing and superior manner. He had asked whether Gerard had managed to see Mont Blanc from the top of the mountain. Gerard,

who had not even searched for that giant of the Alps, but had spent his time lying among the bushes that cloak the hillside, chattering and looking out on the deepening shadows towards Aix, had answered without intelligence.

The incident had annoyed him, but it had not given him pause, nor did the reflection that what Champion had seen Mrs Goddard and her daughter might easily see. He shrugged his shoulders and borrowed one of Illona's habitual expressions: "*Tant pis pour moi.*" A man must have some liberty even though he is married. It would be monstrous if people should imagine that because he was going about with a pretty girl everything was not exactly as it should be. They were not to know that she made her living by dancing at the Piccadilly. She might be some intimate friend of his family for all that Mrs Goddard could tell. But his intelligence warned him that this last attempt at reassuring himself was unworthy. Illona did not look very much like a friend of any English family. She was a creature apart. She had something about her, something indefinable, stormy, disquieting, that could not be concealed. In the first place she did not look English: in the second, her beauty although of no conventional or recognised kind was too insistent for daily wear. Well, it was all very much worth while, this risk that he was running. But the thought of actual risk and indeed the thought that he was in fact doing something which he had no right to do never seriously presented themselves to his mind. He had not much time for such considerations. Now and again he would think vaguely that if his friends knew the details of his life in

Aix they would be surprised ; but they did not know and in their ignorance lay both his protection and his excuse. It was extremely unlikely, so different did this world seem from the world in which he ordinarily had his being, that Mary would ever have even a suspicion of the truth. He was doing her no harm. The fact that he had given himself body and soul for these two weeks to Illona would have no influence on his conduct or on his wife's happiness once he was back in Wimbledon. Surely he would love his wife as much as ever. Perhaps even he would love her more. And his children. He longed to see them again. In no way was he harming them. He would be with them in so short a time.

And in that short time he would have left Illona. Once more he stood away from his own being and his own actions and regarded them. He did love her. He did not know how he would bring himself to leave her, but that he would leave her was certain. The capacity to do so was the essence of his understanding with himself. He would feel it bitterly, but he was old enough to believe that one got over such partings. She would feel it, would feel it, he hoped, more even than he would himself, but in her world he inclined to think that one loved and quarrelled and one loved and parted : it was all in the season's work. Of course there was a difference in their case. She cared for him he believed far, far more than for all the other acquaintances and friends of whom from time to time she had spoken ; and then of course he was her lover and she was his mistress. He was sure in his own mind that she had neither really

loved nor had given herself save in caprice or despair to the men she had known before she knew him. Then with definite intention he put away from him the thought of the inevitable end. Such thoughts could be postponed.

In the meantime Illoua seemed happy enough. If the future troubled her she showed no definite sign of her disquiet. But Gerard, who watched continually her eyes and the conduct of her lips, believed that again and again she hid her real feelings. For hours together at such times she would cling to him, would refuse to talk, would beg him not to go back to his hotel to dress for dinner. "*Oh, je suis contente,*" she would say; "never did I believe that one could be so happy as I am now." And she would look as if tears were coming into her eyes. "*Je suis bête!* But I am not used to being happy like this, *tu sais.* I find it hard to believe in such happiness."

From the beginning Gerard had spoken frankly of his visit to Aix being only for the period of his cure, but, as if by mutual consent, they had ceased to speak of the future. Once, on the evening of their visit to Talloires, he had, while holding her closely to his side in the motor-car as they drove back to Aix, referred to the few days that remained to him and to the days he had wasted before he knew her. "*Dis pas ça, chéri à moi; dis pas ça!* It will come, the end. I know it well. Perhaps it will be my fault. But I love you now. For how long will it last? Who knows? A month perhaps. I'm yours, yours only. Do not let us speak of your going away. . . . Oh, Gerard, Gerard, sometimes I wish I had never seen you!"

CHAPTER XVIII

NOTHING now gave pause to Gerard's course. Save that Illona persisted in her refusal to let him come to the Piccadilly, her whole day was his. They met every morning as soon as the duties of his cure were over, and their faithful chauffeur would take them hither and thither over the face of the land. She appeared never to tire of being with him, of holding his hand, of sitting quietly by his side in the sun. But her pleasure in other things was keen. Gerard discovered that she was no fool. He asked no questions to that end, but it was soon evident to him that she had not been dragged up, but that her education was at least as good as, and perhaps even better than, that of most English girls of her age and of his class. That she used it hardly at all did not apparently lessen its effectiveness on those rare occasions when she did call it into play. One day they had motored to Chambéry, and after lunch Gerard, half apologetically, announced that he wanted to spend an hour in going up to Les Charmettes to see Rousseau's house.

Illona's face brightened: "Rousseau—show me that guide. . . . Rousseau: I shall like that: I have read

Rousseau and I know about Madame de Warens "; and she was eager to be off.

Going through the precise, curious, untouched rooms that had sheltered another love than theirs, Illona's hold on Gerard's arm tightened. She would not speak, and, looking down, he discovered that she was almost weeping. 'To cheer her he said: "This is the sort of little house you and I would be happy in, sweetheart. We'll look for one. Shall it be in England or France? I have to live in England so it had better be there."

They had seen nearly all that there was to see, but she had no more patience and drew him quickly out into the garden and onto the road. "Tell the man to wait. I want to walk a little. Let us go higher, away from people."

They were alone in the climbing lane. Gerard sought to put his arm round her shoulder, but she shook him off. Nor would she suffer his caresses even when in a few minutes she had led him to a corner amid trees where the road and its passers-by might have been a mile away.

"Gerard, to please me, *mon chéri*, never say that again. I love you too well for you to play with me even in your talk. That is not the way you care for me. Now, yes. I amuse you; you like me—love me even. But you don't want to live with me for ever. No"—seeing that he was about to interrupt her she covered his mouth with her hand—"No, don't lie to me. It will all pass, but it will not be my fault. You will tire of me. I know it: I have too much experience, *tu sais*; and then I love you. I can read what is in your heart

even before you know yourself. You will go away from here and you will forget me. By and by you will marry, and it is with your wife that you will have a little house like that. She will never love you as I do, though—*jamais, jamais*—and you will never be as happy as you have been with me.”

At the mention of a wife Gerard, who had never given a serious thought to the fact that he had not told her he was married, unconsciously stiffened. Should he, ought he to, tell her now? What did it matter? What could it matter to her? And then he had agreed with himself that while he remained in this fairy, sun-flushed world he had no wife, that he was free.

But Illona had felt immediately the new constraint in his attitude. She turned and looked at him in the searching way she had. . . .

“Well?” He laughed awkwardly.

“It is I who ask a question! What is it? What has happened? You are not married, you: you do not carry a ring. Perhaps you are *fiancé* and some thought makes you sad. Is that it?”

Her eyes tore the truth from him.

“No, I am not *fiancé*.” He laughed again, harshly, nervously. “I am married, Illona; I am married and I have three children.”

Illona made for a minute no sign of having heard his words. And then of a sudden she wrenched her arm away from him and threw herself face downwards on the grass. At first Gerard could only realise that she was crying by the slow movement of her shoulders, but soon her sobs shook her, and seemed to him to rend the air.

"Illona, Illona, what am I to do? Darling, I didn't know you would mind. I didn't mean to hide it from you. It can make no difference to you—to us now. And then perhaps I thought you would rather not know. . . ." He bent over and caressed her neck and shoulders with his hand, trying ignorantly, vainly, clumsily, to calm, to comfort her.

Minutes passed. Gradually the outward violence of her sobs abated. Gerard's solicitude and patience had given way to a rather angry resentment that his assurances and his caresses had been fruitless, and he had turned from her and was looking moodily at the sky. By and by, he supposed, she would recover. They couldn't stop here all day. The situation was absurd. But, all the same, how he did love her; how much she had come to mean for him with her happy voice, her serious, questioning eyes, and her careless, easy, bird-like grace. If he had hurt her he was sorry. He had hurt her and he had said how sorry he was. He had certainly been stupid. He ought either to have told her the truth at the beginning or he ought to have lied to her just now.

There was a slight movement behind him, but his heart was proud and still too full of resentment for him to turn. And, since she had spurned his advance, it would be better that now she should come the whole way. He sat on like a rock, giving no hint that he had heard her stir. But was she coming any of the way back to him? She had risen and walked away with dragging footsteps towards the lane. . . . Perhaps she was leaving him. She was capable of it.

He was on the point of jumping up when he heard her stop.

“Gerard——”

It was not a loud cry, and stubbornly, as this was not enough to ease his pride, he ignored it.

“Gerard——” and then before he could answer he heard her run towards him, and she was in his arms, sobbing again on his breast, crying as if in truth her heart would break. This time he had the sense to keep silence. He strained her to him, holding her tighter and tighter so that weeping itself must have been an effort. Slowly after a while her mouth found his, and then she drew away from him a little and looked into his face.

“Oh, my dear, my dear, why didn’t you tell me before? I could have stood it then, but now it is so hard. Tell me, do you love your wife? Frankly—I want to know the truth. I have the right to know, *tu sais*.”

“Illona——” he stumbled in what he thought he would say, and paused.

“No—*dis moi la vérité*. I will be brave. Do you love her, Gerard? Do you remember her, is she in your mind, when you are with me?”

Her eyes, so candid, so tragic now, so clouded with sorrow, forbade the words he would have spoken.

“I did love her, Illona; I do love her—but it is not in the way I love you. I love you so much more; I have been so much happier with you than I ever was with her. Truly, I have thought of her hardly at all in these last days, and never when I have been with

you. Yes, I love her : she is kind and good, but she is different from you. She is the mother of my children, but, dear, I think you understand me better, and perhaps even you care for me more." It was for the moment the real truth, the whole truth as he knew it, that he spoke. He could see that he was believed.

"Yes, my darling, my darling, I do love you more. How do I know? Ah, I know. No one could love you as I have loved you—but oh, oh! why didn't you tell me?" She stopped and seemed to think. "I believe you like me. Indeed, I am sure you do. But I am one of many perhaps. Have there been others? Have you deceived her before?"

"Never, I swear it—never, never." It was good to be on firm ground.

"Then you do love her—and your children; what about them? Do you love them? If I had a child I should talk about him always. And I have wanted a child—how much I have wanted one! A little baby would have been a consolation for all there has been hard and bitter in my life. Gerard, I want to tell you: I have dreamed that we might have a child, a boy who would grow like you. You would never have known. I should never have told you. Never should I have annoyed you with him. . . . And now all that is finished. You are another woman's. She bears you your children. Oh, Gerard, Gerard——" and she broke off to surrender herself once more to tears, to sobs that this time tore also at Gerard's heart.

Emotions of this, and indeed of any, kind had been until these last few days so foreign to Gerard's taste

and experience that he had no idea what to do with the stricken girl who clung so tightly to his side. His own feelings were soon under control, but the storm had left its traces: he felt shaken. It was as if he had shared in some confidence of which he was not worthy, had participated in some crisis for which he was not fit. What should he do now? All that had happened was, he supposed, his own fault, but it was also his misfortune. He argued the matter out in his mind and then, turning to contemplate his companion, all reason was vanquished and he cared only to recover for her her happiness, her content, her peace of mind. He feared to talk. Already words had done so much harm. He sought to calm her distress with caresses, with sweet foolish phrases, and after a while he succeeded—or else Illona's tortured mind had mastered itself. She turned her tear-stained face to him and felt vaguely for her handkerchief, that handkerchief which was never by any chance where it should be, and for which now he had to substitute his own. Even he dried her eyes, and when they were dry, when the tears had ceased to form in the dark corners of her lids, he kissed and kissed again the places where they had been.

Now she smiled wanly: "*Nen parlons plus!* It's done. Anyhow, I'm glad I know. Take me back now. Oh, my dear, dear Gerard, my little heart feels so small, so pressed together—you must hold me in your arms and comfort me and help me to forget. No, I shall never forget—but I shall pretend. And we have so few, few days left to be together. I understand now why the end is to come next week. I'll be brave." She stood

up and shook herself as if to free her mind from the burrs of evil thoughts. "To-night—Gerard, to-night I will not leave you. I can't go and dance. *Je me fiche de Piaci* and his *amende*. If he is very angry I'll go. But I make him no money since you came and stole away my love, so perhaps he won't mind."

CHAPTER XIX

WHATEVER else Gerard Blundell had intended and whatever else he could pardon in himself, he had certainly not intended nor could he pardon the havoc that—even if it were only for a time—he had caused in the mind of the young girl whose acquaintanceship, begun in idleness, had grown into affection and had become now at once so menacing and so joyful. He had fallen in love. That was nothing. One fell out of love. But he loved. And that meant so much. That he would have to leave her was certain, to leave her in a few days. He could not, must not, make plans to see her again after that. The random thought that she might dance in London he had put away from him as soon almost as it was conceived. They must pass out of one another's lives—but not yet: there remained still the best part of a week. He must try to make her happy, and at the same time he must do what he could to soften the bitterness of the end when it came.

It was the day after their visit to Chambéry. Gerard was waiting for Illona's return from the Piccadilly. She had gone there to make her peace with Piaci, to arrange herself afresh for the day and to get any letters

there might be for her. She came back with an angry and clouded face. Piaci had been insolent. She was to be fined a hundred francs. Not that that mattered. It would come out of her share of the *quête* when it was divided up at the end of the season, and anyhow Sybil, who had been there in previous years, had told her that, even if one had been fined nothing at all, the result, the share, that each girl received became in some way or other marvellously small. No; what had angered her were Piaci's taunts, and, worse still, the way in which his wife — "*c'est une femme affreuse, tu sais*" — had spoken. Ilona's *camarades* had apparently been talking of the manner in which she passed her days, and that, combined with the facts that she did not bring her lover to the Piccadilly every night to spend, to toss about, his money, and that she herself had lost most of her provocative gaiety, her allure, her light indifference to what she did and to what was done, angered Piaci in his pocket. It was not good for his business that one of his dancers should develop a serious affair and should herself become serious. A dancer should be *léger*, gay, impertinent; she should not care what happened as long as she could wheedle gold out of the men who either pleased or annoyed her and make them spend money and more money and yet more money for the good of the house. So much for her anger. The cause of her further distress did not at first appear. It had much the same root.

They were on a terrace overlooking the Lac du Bourget. It was a common enough little place, too

near to Aix to have any serious custom and yet in its way simple and pleasant. They had driven out in a horse-carriage. For one reason and another they had had no temptation to go further afield. Illona at least had hardly recovered from her emotion of the previous day—although she had successfully concealed any outward and visible signs of its havoc—and she had herself vetoed their wonted automobile. “*Pas la peine*,” she had said; “and besides, why spend the money?”

Why spend the money indeed! Gerard had come to ask himself that question many times more than once. Never in his life had he spent money as he had spent it during the last week or so. He thought with foreboding of the state in which his pass-book would be when next he saw it. The clerk at the *Crédit Lyonnais* was becoming quite an old friend. They shook hands warmly with one another every day, and Gerard tried to dissemble his shyness at drawing yet more cheques with vague attempts at conversation about the state of the weather, the European situation, the season. Five hundred francs seemed in this new life in which he was embarked to last only a few hours. It was not that Illona showed any definite wish to spend money wantonly, but somehow or other in her society money melted away. There were the motor-car and expensive meals—they were having a cheap meal to-day: she had wished it; she had asked for a bourgeois restaurant—and souvenirs, little trumpery but all the same costly souvenirs of every new place she visited—little presents in gold or silver or stone for her mother, for the concierge of her apartment in Paris, for the *caissière* of the Esqueline—

‘a Montmartre restaurant to which, she told Gerard, she went morning after morning when her ordinary dancing was over—for the concierge’s little boy, for the wife of her coiffeur, for the poor lame daughter of the cabman who came every night to drive her to her work. Louis and francs had but a passing acquaintance with Gerard’s pocket in those mad days. He realised it all well enough, but he refused to allow the facts to trouble him. In a week—in a week he would be sane again, and sad. In the meantime let her have all the pleasure that he could give her. Let her be generous. She was used to spending as the whim seized her. Her companions had, Gerard gathered, never been mean, and they had always been rich. They had showered upon her rings, bracelets, *bijoux* of all kinds—most of which she seemed to have lost or mislaid. He had done nothing of that sort. Once when he had offered to give her a gold wrist watch they had seen in a window at Geneva and at which she had exclaimed with pleasure, she had refused although he had gone to the length of bringing it out for her to try on.

“No, no, Gerard, *chéri à moi*, I want no presents from you—not now. When you are back in London you shall send me a ring and I shall wear it always to remind me of you. But that is all I shall let you give me.”

Money as money had no real value for her. She said frankly that although she liked it she could not keep it. “I don’t know where it goes. In Paris I make hundreds of francs sometimes in a night and in three or four days *c’est tout parti*—it has all disappeared.” When Gerard knew her first her purse was full of gold. He

carried it generally for her, but now he had occasion again and again to notice that it was almost empty. "Where's all your money?" he asked. "Oh, I don't make any money nowadays—not since I've known you. I shall have to work extra hard when you go away, Gerard; I shall have to pay more attention to my business, *tu sais*. Why don't I make it? Oh, because I don't like the work any more. I can't sit and make love to men now nor let men make love to me, because I'm thinking all the time about you. Oh, they make me angry. Lots of things I used not to mind disgust me now. I keep wondering what you would say if you saw or heard—and then I get cross and get up and go away. I fight with everyone—and it is all your fault, *chéri*. But I'm glad really. I'm poor now but *je m'en fiche*. I'll get rich again. It's not difficult for a girl to make money in my business when she is pretty and dances well and when she has *beaucoup de toupet*—cheek, you know."

They had finished their lunch. Everyone else was finishing his lunch too or sleeping away the first part of the halcyon afternoon. It was that still hour that falls sometimes on those high valleys. All movement seemed to have ceased for a time. No boat, no flock, no birds, no man disturbed the quiet. The hills, the lake, looked painted rather than real. Here and there a light pillar of smoke ascended into the pale blue of the sky. . . . Gerard, who had been counting in his mind the hours that still remained, looked at his companion. Her profile was turned to him; she was gazing out over the water, lost in thought. He

could not tell whether she was happy or disturbed. Such beauty as she had showed best in repose, but always her repose seemed to hold some quality of regret, of doubt. Then she turned :

“Gerard, I want to speak to you, to ask you something—*mais j’ai honte*. Wait, I’ll come next to you.” She pushed the table away a little and made room for herself on his bench, nestling close to him and holding his hand.

“*Écoute, mon chéri adoré* : you mustn’t be angry. You know when I went back just now I found a letter from my mother. She wants me to send her some money. I always send her money but—but for the last two weeks I haven’t, and she has her rent to pay. *Pauvre maman!* And, dear . . . well, I haven’t got any money. It’s never been like this before ; I have never been without more than I really needed, but since you’ve been here, *tu sais*, I have been *si sérieuse* I have hardly made a louis a night—sometimes not that. Men don’t like me any more. I am glad, though ; I’m not sorry. Now I’m yours only. I don’t know how I shall ever go back into that life”—she spoke bitterly—“*oh, comme tout ça me dégoûte maintenant*. . . . And that’s not the worst : I have my own rent to pay—of my apartment in Paris, you know. I hadn’t forgotten, but I never worry : I always thought something would turn up—and it hasn’t.” She went on rather breathlessly as if to prevent Gerard’s interrupting her : “But it is not to disturb you, Gerard *à moi* ; if you haven’t got it I will arrange somehow. Trust me for that : I can always arrange. But it’s *ennuyeux tout de même*.”

Gerard's curiosity made him ask: "How would you arrange? It isn't necessary though, of course."

"Oh, I don't know, always *je me débrouille*—always I can get myself out of a scrape."

He put his arm round her shoulders to reassure her "How much do you want? Of course you shall have it—this very afternoon."

She named a sum, not a huge sum, not perhaps as much as Gerard expected, but enough certainly to make no small difference to that account which nowadays was more in his mind than it had ever been before.

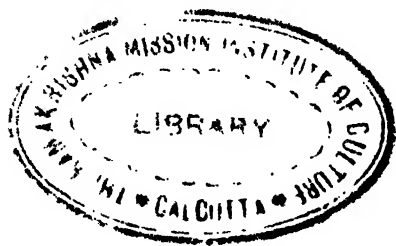
"*Bien, mon enfant.* I'll go and get it at the bank—there'll be time before it closes. Now I deserve a kiss for having let you be silent through almost the whole of *déjeuner*." He put his hand under her chin and lifted her mouth to his. She laughed with pleasure.

"I was so quiet because I was ashamed and unhappy: I didn't like to ask you for money, you know. Perhaps it's strange: I never minded asking anyone else for money. I asked you that first night. Sybil told me to. She said she was sure you wouldn't know you ought to give us something if I didn't ask. Was it true or not?"

Gerard laughed and kissed her again. "Quite true, my little pet. But I had forgotten all about it. I only remembered you and your eyes and your kisses, you know—it was stupid of you all the same not to ask me directly you came back this morning. You wouldn't have had that anxious look on your face then. *Pauvre petite Ilona*, I shall begin to think you don't trust me. And now let us take a boat and I'll row you about—

or you shall row me about and I will pretend to go to sleep."

He felt very cheerful. It was curious, and he wondered at the fact, but he was conscious of an actual glow of satisfaction that Illona had asked him for money and that he was giving it to her without question and without difficulty.



CHAPTER XX

THE time passed swiftly, too swiftly. As the day on which his cure was to come to an end approached more nearly, Gerard found it increasingly difficult to reconcile himself to leaving this girl who had taken so great a place in his mind. The joy that he had when he was with her began to be spoiled by the imminence of their separation. In this last fortnight he had given himself so completely to her, had confided in her affection so unreservedly, that he could not imagine how he would do without her when next week he was passing through the tedious period of his after-cure, and when in three weeks he would be back at his work and in his home. Docteur Ribot had quite early put his foot down and had insisted on the after-cure. It was essential that his patient, with whose progress he was very well satisfied, should go somewhere for a fortnight—to the sea for choice. Gerard came to dread the prospect. If he could, so to speak, tear himself from Illona's arms, board the train, pass without delay through Paris, take the fastest boat, and then begin to lose his memories at his desk in Pall Mall and in his home, in the company of his children, in the laughing society of Vivian, of Dickie, and of Basil—

why then he would be able to get along. But to be alone for a fortnight, alone with no one to talk to, nothing to do——!

The difficulty about Champion and the Goddards had gone the way that all such difficulties go when they are ignored. Gerard, however, realised that he had purchased his freedom at the cost of his reputation, at the cost of his reputation for politeness, for the ordinary manners of an English gentleman, if not for virtue and respectability. The egregious Champion had ceased to persecute him with proposals that they should go about together. He knew enough, Gerard supposed, to suspect that his fellow-guest was no fit and proper companion for a man who stood well in the best local society of Brondesbury and West Kilburn. And yet, after all, were not Brondesbury and West Kilburn as intelligent and creditable as Wimbledon? Gerard felt ashamed of himself. As for the Goddards, for the moment he had given up troubling about them. He would, in spite of the increasing coldness of Mrs Goddard's salutes, bow politely whenever he met either mother or daughter in the hall or garden of the hotel; he would even discuss the weather with them; but he knew that he had shown far too clearly that he had no wish to take his father's place as an intimate of the Goddard family, and it was at least possible that some day or other he would be made to pay for this demonstration.

Nor had he mentioned the Goddards in his letters to his wife. Those letters still continued. Day after day one would leave by the evening post for England, and in every one of them Gerard would say frankly where

he had been and what he had seen. He would describe Grenoble as a disappointment, the Grande Chartreuse as worth seeing, and so on, all in the best style of the average tourist. About two things only was he lacking in candour: he never said that he had on any one of these excursions a companion, and he left his wife to take it for granted that he travelled in the ordinary first-class carriage of the modest Englishman's Continental holiday. Also he had entirely given up expressing the wish that she and the children were with him. Duplicity did not come naturally to him; he liked his wife and loved his children and respected his home, and to lie in that way would have damaged his sense of what was decent.

Ilona never told Gerard whether she also had cherished the idea and had feared to give it birth. In any case it appeared to be his own:

Two days only remained, two days hardly indeed, for it was already the midday of July 8th and on the 10th Docteur Ribot was to pay his last morning visit to his patient and Gerard was to be free to go where he would as long as he did take a holiday of a fortnight and did honestly observe certain simple regulations as to his method of life during that short period. "Then you'll be all right till you come back here again next year," the doctor had added in the cheerful way with which the medical man of the Continent assumes that once having surrendered yourself to his treatment you are to continue bound to the yearly loss of a whole month until the Almighty or his own growing banking

account decides for him that he had better cease practising. Gerard had given no thought to where he should go. It would be natural to go north, to one of the bathing-places in Normandy or Picardy, but if he went north would it not be his duty to press his wife to join him? And, if that proved impossible, what, after all, was there to prevent his going straight through to Bude and spending there his penitential fortnight?

No, his inclinations were neither towards Dieppe nor Cornwall. In the one place, with the addition of the sea and the subtraction of the mountains, the people and the life would, he imagined, remind him at every moment of the day of what he had left behind at Aix; in the other he would find himself thrown at once into the arms of his family, into the closest proximity to all the little domestic worries which seemed at this distance to loom intolerably irksome: he would be exchanging the spacious if dull saloons of his hotel for the cupboard-like rooms of an English lodging-house, and the naughty freedom of the Savoyard valley for the rather grey cliffs and restricted excursions of a small seaside resort; Mary would think him mad if he began to dash about Cornwall, from Whitesand Bay to Penzance, in a four-cylinder motor-car at four or five pounds a day! Besides, he liked what he had seen of the South, and as he had come so far it would be a pity to exchange its sun and gay colour, its warmth and freedom, for the colder attractions of the North.

He took his "Baedeker" and looked at the map. To get to the coast anywhere south of Brittany would not be so very easy. Moreover he had no assurance that it

had the kind of beauty that he wanted. Why not push further down through these Alps into Provence, to the coast somewhere in that part which was yet unspoiled by the tourist? Provence had a magical name. Vaguely he felt that you went to Grenoble and looked out over the whole valley of the Mediterranean and that every village and every town would bear enchanted memories of the past. . . .

And, after all, why should he go alone? All things are possible if one tries hard enough, and surely Illona could come with him if she chose and if, choosing, she determined to have her way. They would have then another fortnight together, a fortnight that would in very truth be carved out of their lives, cut off from the past and from the future. In these two weeks that were almost gone they had had to submit to so many disabilities: there had been his cure and her dancing, for instance—and they were not the chief. But if they could go away together they would be so definitely alone. It would be easier then, perhaps, having had so full a draught of happiness, to separate.

Directly they met he broached the subject:

“Illona, you know what happens the day after to-morrow?”

“*Mais oui, mon chéri*: it seems to be a cheerful thought to you; I’ll try to be pleased too if you wish. You look forward to being with your children and your wife, is that it? And to being alone first for a while to rest without anyone. I am going to be brave.” Her eyes contradicted her words.

“My stupid Illona, I shall be as sorry to go, sorrier

perhaps, as you will be to say good-bye to me. But I have a plan. You know I have to have first what they call an 'after-cure'—a fortnight somewhere to rest in after all the hard work of the cure—now why shouldn't you come with me?"

The tears that had begun to collect in her eyes forgot their errand and disappeared. "Oh, oh, that would be good! But how can I arrange it? Piaci would never let me go. I had to sign a contract to stop till the end of the season——"

"Well, the season hasn't really begun yet. Everyone says that. It doesn't begin properly till August. You'd be back long before August. That's when he wants you. Go to him and tell him you're ill, or that your mother is ill—tell him anything to get a fortnight's holiday with me." He looked at her and added: "Illona, I don't believe you like my idea; I don't believe you want to come."

She put her hand out and took his: "Don't say that, Gerard: surely you know better. But you mustn't make a joke about my mother being ill; it might happen. I will ask Piaci. I will do my possible. *Mais tout le temps maintenant il m'engueule*. He will fly into a great rage. Perhaps he'll put me out—that would be a good thing! I'd go at once without asking him, but then he'd keep my trunk. I'd perhaps not get it away from him. There's a big *amende* if a girl breaks her contract. He's so well with the police too."

"What's the *amende*? We might pay that."

I don't know. I haven't even got the contract. He promised to give me a copy."

"Well, he fined you a hundred francs for being away a night: if you were away fifteen nights it would cost fifteen hundred——" He broke off and made a wry face.

"Leave it to me. I will talk to him to-night. *Nous verrons*. He'll know that I want to go away with you, but that can't be helped. He doesn't like you, *tu sais*."

She refused to talk about it any more. "I don't want to count on it," she said.

The rather glum *maître d'hôtel* at the Pavillon Rivollier liked to see Illona arrive, and the next day, when she ran excitedly up the steps crying out "*Arrangé! Arrangé!*" before she had half crossed the terrace to the table at which Gerard was in the habit of awaiting her, he smiled as if he too were in the secret of these lovers in whose doings he was beginning to take so fatherly an interest. Your head waiter in such places has a surfeit of sordid love. "*Encore un miché!*" he says to himself when a young Englishman sits waiting for the arrival of a woman not of his own race and world. But these two were different, so he gave them of his best, and he hoped devoutly that whatever it was that had been arranged had been arranged well, and that it would have all the success that it deserved.

"Oh, but, *chéri*, it was difficult!" She laughed and would hardly wait for a footstool to be brought and for the little waiter to get out of earshot. "It's all arranged though. *Mais j'étais venue, tu sais*. I asked Piaci directly I got in last night. I caught him alone. He listened and then he called his wife, and told her. 'So you want to go off with that lover of yours that

you never bring here,' she said at once. 'It has nothing to do with you, madame,' I answered. 'If I go I can go where I like, and I can go with anyone I like, I suppose.' 'Well, you can't go, it's absurd; *n'est ce pas*, Amalio?' she said to Piaci. 'Not so fast, not so fast; let us see what Illona proposes. You can't go for nothing,' he added, turning to me; 'you'll be breaking your contract and I shall have to get another dancer while you're away.' I knew that was *blague*, and I waited for him to speak again, but his wife interrupted: 'Oh yes, if she likes to pay a hundred francs a night—or if her lover likes to pay a hundred francs a night for her—she can go then.' She hates me because—oh, because of a lot of things, because I haven't brought men there since I've known you, because I never made you spend money there, and—mostly—because I don't like her, the *sale femme*. 'That's too much; it wouldn't be fair,' Piaci said; 'Illona can go if she brings me here in my hand a thousand francs.' I ran away quickly upstairs to get dressed then; I didn't want to give her the opportunity to change his mind."

A thousand francs—forty pounds! The sum was enough to give Gerard pause, but anyhow it was now too late. The matter was "*arrangé*." He couldn't throw Illona over, and indeed he didn't want to. Forty pounds! Well, it was forty pounds the more. Surely it was and would be worth it. To-morrow they would start, and in fifteen or sixteen days the happiness that he had won would be at an end—but it would have been; it was a thing he would never, never forget, would never wish to forget: of that he was sure. Look-

ing round and seeing that no waiter had them under his eye and that there were no other guests to make a scandal or to be amused, he leant over the table and took quickly her face between his hands and kissed her on the mouth. She saw nothing of his second's doubt ; she had been too absorbed in her own success.

“ It will be *une vraie lune de miel*,” she said.

CHAPTER XXI

EVIDENTLY Piaci did not change his mind. Gerard Blundell produced a note for a thousand francs, Illona took it and carried it off cheerfully as if such sums meant nothing at all to her, and surely could mean very little to her lover—Why, poor darling, should she think otherwise? Gerard asked himself; he had taken no steps to make her understand that he was not a millionaire—and she came back the next morning with her cheeks flushed with excitement, pleasure, anticipation.

“Bu’ *chéri*, you haven’t said where we are going. Not far, I hope. And it must be a quiet place. I want to have you to myself; and then too I am not chic; I have no dresses, no hats, nothing at all. Oh, and we must go and buy one dress—one is enough, and one hat, and some shoes and a cloak to keep the dust away when we travel. We go and get them now, *hein?*”

Gerard, who had been giving another hour to his guide-book and had been puzzling out times and trains with the aid of an “Indicateur-Chaix,” announced that they were going far, that they were to stop first at Grenoble and that then they were, so to speak, to fall

off the edge of the Alps and to go on falling until they reached Marseilles. "It will take hours and hours—a whole day, and it will be very hot, but we shall have a carriage all to ourselves at this time of the year, and then when we get to Marseilles we shall see the sea and later on we'll bathe in it—so you must buy a bathing-dress too. Finish your lunch quickly and we'll go and find everything you want." He had not bargained for these additional expenses, but he might just as well hang for a sheep as for a lamb. Illona should be happy for these fourteen days if it was in his power to make her so.

"*Chiche! Chiche!*" She clapped her hands and the head waiter looked at her and wished that he were young again too, and he wished that Gerard would be good to her and that the years that were to come would be good to her. . . .

Illona had never bathed in the sea. She could swim; she had learnt to swim at school, in a river. The idea of being actually in the sea and of being tossed about by its waves at once delighted and terrified her. The bathing-dress became the one important item in her trousseau; it took immediate precedence of the frock and the hat and the shoes. She dragged Gerard off at once to a shop in the rue des Bains where she had seen such things. She insisted on his helping her in her choice, and he shyly did his best, getting indeed some pleasure out of the transaction and remembering not at all that if his wife or his sister had wanted him to accompany them on such an errand he would have stoutly refused to go further than the door of the shop. They were soon satisfied and, while Illona explained

some slight alteration that she wanted made, he strolled about looking at other wares. Suddenly through the window he saw Mrs Goddard and her daughter, saw them, and, before he could even turn his back, realised that they were entering and that they had seen him. Evidently Mrs Goddard had at least for the moment forgotten her resentment:

“Why, Mr Blundell, you *are* a stranger: one wouldn’t think we lived in the same hotel. You are never there for meals now, and we haven’t yet had——”

She stopped midway in her sentence, to look with astonishment at the cause of interruption. Illona, bathing-dress in hand, seeing nothing at all, thinking of nothing but her purchase and of how it would suit her, had run across the shop and seized her lover by the arm. “See, Gerard *chéri*; tell me: don’t you think that if they take away this braid altogether it will be better—you say: I want it to please you.”

Gerard, who had no time to reason, no time to be polite, no time even to excuse himself, found that he had been dragged back to the counter. Continually, in the future, he wondered what he should have done, but at the moment he had no opportunity of doing anything. When he did manage to free himself and to turn, Mrs Goddard had gone. “I don’t care,” he said to himself; “*je m’en fiche*, like Illona. She no doubt hurried her daughter away and thinks that I am lost for ever, and she’ll understand now why I am never at the hotel. Well, she shall see us again as she has seen us once; she shall see, the stupid old woman, that I have nothing I’m ashamed of.”

He paid for the bathing-dress and went out into the street, walked up and down flaunting his happiness, looking out for the Goddards, determined that he would find them again. And he did find them, but not until Illona's other shopping had been completed, not until he had paid another visit to the bank. He remembered that Mrs Goddard had told him that her one extravagance was to take tea in the Villa des Fleurs. Hitherto he had avoided the place at that hour; to-day he sought it. Yes, the Goddards were there and they could hardly fail to see him come in. The table he was allotted was not far from where they sat. He chose a seat which would give them his back and an uninterrupted view of his companion. He wanted them to see her now. He was proud of her.

CHAPTER XXII

ILLONA brought with her to the station a happy face. If happiness is the one necessity at the beginning of a honeymoon, then indeed she was in a fair way to enjoy that *hunc de miel* that she had promised herself. She had forgotten her dislike of the railway, and on the day following their departure she even came smiling to the 7.22 morning train out of Grenoble for Marseilles. At first Gerard hid from her the length of the journey that lay before them. He was nervous, afraid that her patience, her good nature, might not last out over ten hours and twenty-two minutes; but he might have spared himself the anxiety. Everything went well. The journey was hot and dusty but it was also strange and interesting. They had neither of them climbed up over mountains; and Illona found again and again in those Savoy uplands little villages in which she begged that they should stop instead of going on to the sea. Now indeed she seemed to have no tastes but the most simple, no wishes that it would not be reasonable to satisfy. Hour after hour she was content to sit, Gerard's hand in hers, watching from the window the passing land-

scape and turning every little while her face to be kissed. . . .

Marseilles in summer is perhaps no more the true Marseilles than it is in February, but certainly it has in June qualities of tradition, of deep and constant beauty, that it lacks in winter. Illona clapped her hands at the sea and at the ships; Gerard was excited by his first view of the Mediterranean. They had time to wash away the traces of their journey, to walk down the Cannebière to the Vieux Port, to dine *chez* Basso-Bregailon in the open air, where, as they experimented with oursins and bouillabaisse and drank cassis, they could look out at the curious southern boats and the odd many-coloured sails, the decaying architecture of the Empire, and the constant passing to and fro of the peoples of all the world in the dying light of the southern sky. The next morning they left betimes, reached Toulon, changed to the light railway, and almost before they were ready for lunch they were at Le Lavandou, the place which Gerard had chosen, but of which he knew no more than that it was a fishing village and that its hills were covered with lavender. Illona had given him no trouble. She had run from one side to the other of the compartment, exclaiming at the cypresses, at the olive trees, at the blue stretches of the sea. Not even did she prove restive when they arrived at their hotel, picked out at random or because its porter was a little more energetic than his rival, and found the shabby rooms, the worn furniture, the one servant. . . . "I feel myself well here," she said; "and"

Gerard, I know how long you say you will stop, but we won't count the days; I'll try to forget that the end is coming so soon. My dear, my dear, I will be so happy."

In Le Lavandou you can go out on to the beach and walk for miles without finding a road, without crossing more than the immemorial paths, the sheep tracks, the fishermen's walks that carry one back to the age of the Heroes. Gerard had written to London for a copy of "The Earthly Paradise," and Illona never tired of sitting at his knee and listening to the stories of the past. Together they peopled the woods and bays with fauns and centaurs, with armed warriors and strange long-oared vessels. For hours they would bathe in water crystal-clear in the sunlight; and they would drive up into the hills and lose themselves in the vineyards. For Gerard they were days cloudless as the sky. He forgot London; he forgot his home. No letters left Le Lavandou for England. He was in love. Each day Illona meant more to him. He never tired of her; he never tired of looking at her, of listening to her talk. Away from the distractions and the luxury of Aix she cast aside all that part of her that was impatient and wilful. She waited on his wishes, caring for him as a mother might, and holding to him always with a passionate strength that seemed to deny the passing of the days. . . .

But the days did pass. That side of Gerard which was prudence plucked fearfully at his shoulder when a fortnight was over. "Illona, sweetheart, to-morrow I must go back," he said.

She looked at him with a white face. "I know, I know. I have feared and expected this moment for all the last two days. I was afraid whenever I saw you you were going to speak. Oh, and I have longed so much that you would forget for a little while. But we will start when you wish. . . . *Dis*, Gerard, can I go with you as far as Marseilles?"

"Of course, my pet. If you don't mind going a longer way round, you can travel with me to Mâcon. Otherwise indeed you'd have that long, lonely journey up to Grenoble all by yourself—for I must get back to England as quickly as I can. As a matter of fact, it will take you longer if you go alone by the way we came."

"No, Gerard, I won't come with you further than Marseilles. I will find it easier to part from you there."

He was disappointed. He couldn't understand. He was even a little resentful.

The next afternoon they left Le Lavandou. "I am leaving there all my little heart," Illona said as the toy train steamed out of the station. "Well—*tant pis!* but I have been happy. What more could I ask? Gerard, you have been kind to me. I love you too much, too much. It isn't reasonable; *c'est bête, n'est-ce pas?* A woman like me ought not to love. I haven't the time to love; it's a luxury for the others, but not for me. It won't happen again though; it never happened before. Pity me a little, dear; hold me tight to you; put your arm round me. They won't see, and, even if they do, what does it matter? Nothing matters except that to-morrow morning *tu me quittes*. Oh, Gerard, Gerard"—and she broke down for a minute.

On the morrow Gerard's train left Marseilles at nine o'clock. Illona would have an hour to wait, and then after travelling for ten hours would, if her train was punctual, catch a connection at Grenoble that would bring her to Aix-les-Bains before midnight. "You will have time to dress and dance if you are not too tired," Gerard said, and she turned to him with her eyes full of reproach :

"I shall sleep in Grenoble, *chéri* : I couldn't dance to-morrow. I don't know how I shall ever be able to dance like that again. But I shall : *tu verras*—but no, you won't know. You tell me I shan't see you again, Gerard ; and I shall never write to you. . . . No, not even if I am ill. *Je suis trop fière pour ça*. You think it is better for you that we should part. *Bien !* I won't even have your address. I shall carry you and my memories of you in my heart always, and that shall be enough for me. I am not worthy of more, *moi, une petite danseuse du Piccadilly !*"

Her mood was one of resentment and of unhappiness. Gerard, whose mind, so well disposed, so properly under control, so disciplined, had already gone ahead of him to his desk in Pall Mall and was occupying itself with thoughts of the work that five weeks ago he had left half done, responded to the best of his ability. He tried to console her but he failed even to understand. She drew him as much as she had ever done, more indeed, but he had in his heart faced the fact that he was about to leave her. The separation was in a sense accomplished. He feared a scene now, and almost wished that the hour of his departure might quickly come.

And when it came near, when they were both on the railway platform pacing to and fro watching the hands of the clock, Gerard, although his heart was cold and his mouth dry, although he felt that anyone could see he was shivering with suppressed excitement, showed no emotion. Illona held his arm, clung to him, seemed almost to resent the little ways in which he hid his nervousness. He bought her papers and books; he bade the porter who had charge of her poor little trunk and her bag, watch carefully over her until her train started; he found her flowers for her dress, a pillow for her head. . . .

"*En voiture pour Paris!*" Four, three minutes still remained.

Gerard bent and kissed her. "Again, again!" she said, breathing deeply, her eyes sunk back in her head but reaching out from their caves as if to compel the secrets of his heart. "*Tu m'aimes?* You love me truly, Gerard? I have not been cheated? Oh, Gerard, what shall I do, what shall I do, when you are gone? I think I shall die." And then, suddenly, without a word to him, she tore her arm away, and ran to the porter. "*Mettez mes affaires dans le coupé, vite, vite. Après tout, j'irai à Paris, moi.*" And then to Gerard: "I can't leave you yet, my dear, my dear. I thought I was strong. I shall go to Mâcon. Forgive me, Gerard. My ticket is wasted, I know. *Pardon!*"

The train had started. Gerard, hardly realising what had happened, found himself alone with her again. She had flung herself into a corner, and had hidden her face in her arms. . . .

Only minutes had passed. Gerard, moodily wondering what would happen next, wondering whether he was glad or sorry, wondering what would happen at Mâcon, sat by the corridor and looked out into the Etang de Berre. He had not bargained for what had just occurred. It didn't seem to him quite fair. He had been honest; he had been frank; he had done nothing which he had not settled to do a fortnight ago. He too would feel the pain of parting, but he would feel it none the less for its postponement for half a dozen hours—nor would Illona. He moved and went close to her, pulled her hands from her face, drew back her head and kissed her wet eyes. She pulled him down to her and held him with her arms.

"Gerard, my dear, dear Gerard: forgive me; please, dear, forgive me. I won't be like that at Mâcon. Truly I won't. But I couldn't let you go. I couldn't, sweetheart—and you did tell me I might travel with you as far as Mâcon. *Je suis bête*. But now I'll be reasonable; I'll be reasonable all the time. *Tu verras*. See, it's finished; I'm not crying. I won't cry again," and she sat up, dabbed at her eyes and turned to him a smiling face, a sad smiling face.

She was as good as her word. The waiter came and offered them places in the *wagon-restaurant* for lunch. "We'll go to the first *déjeuner*, Gerard: I'm hungry, me; I had no breakfast, you know"; and through lunch she was lively and seemed happy and even pleased when she recognised an admirer of hers in the person of a French officer at the next table: "I like him; he's a good friend to me. Oh, and he

dances well: I taught him, you know." When they were back in their places she took off her hat and lay down, her head on Gerard's knee, one hand holding his. And so she lay till they came to Lyons.

"How much longer have we, dear?"

"Fifty-nine minutes."

At that she sat up, and went through the feminine process of tidying her hair. "We have been happy, Gerard? Nobody can take this last month from me. *Et toi?* You won't forget your little Illona, even though you never see her again. You won't be able to forget me. I want you to remember, dear, but never to be sad *à cause de moi.*"

He tried to cheer her, to assure her that whatever happened to him she would never be without a place in his heart, but she protested that she wished him not to talk. She seemed content to sit, as she had so often done, at his side, holding tight his hand.

The train began to slow down. The air-brakes made their familiar sound. Gerard busied himself with taking her things out into the corridor and to the door of the carriage. She followed him. "We only stop three minutes, you know," he said.

The train stopped. He went down and helped her to the platform.

"Gerard, kiss me once on my mouth and then go back to your place. I don't want you to stand there. Remember my ring, dear: but do not write to me. Now . . ."

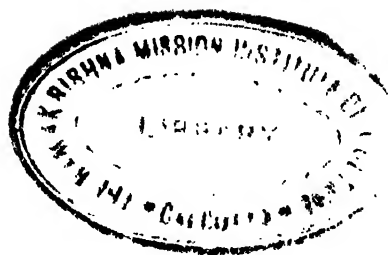
Gerard went back to his seat as he was bidden, lowered the window and held out his hand. She just touched

it and then stepped away from the train. Her eyes held no tears, but to Gerard it seemed that they held an infinite misery. She looked a poor little figure as she stood there waiting for the train to go, and when it started she followed it with her gaze.

BOOK II

La vie est dure et amère, et les femmes sont chères.





CHAPTER I

GERARD BLUNDELL fitted back into his niche in London and his nest in Wimbledon without either the pangs of regret or the accusing of conscience. His partners were glad to see him—the more glad indeed because his return meant that now they could take their holidays, shake the dust of Pall Mall off their patent leather and don the brown boots of country gentlemen. And there was work for Gerard to do. Pontifex and Mathews had, to an extent that they had never realised, come to depend on their younger partner's energy and initiative, and they had during his absence sat supine in their separate offices or festive in their separate clubs: "Blundell will be back directly: he will attend to that," they had said to one another and to the world. And, best of all, they had not interfered with the projects that he had put on foot. No scheme of his had become disorganised owing to the officious meddling of another hand. He found his desk as he had left it. His keys had never been used. There was a welcome for him and, for the rest, he was at liberty to begin to work where he had left off. . . .

And at The Haven, Acacia Road, Wimbledon,

nothing was 'changed. Mary Blundell had turned a deaf ear to the suggestion made to her from Aix that she and the children should not hurry home from Bude but should stop on at the sea through at least the first hot weeks of August. Her sense of duty told her that her place was in her own house. Otherwise her husband would find a cold welcome, or he would have to stop at his club. Either course was abhorrent to her well-ordered mind. He had telegraphed from Dijon the hour of his arrival in London, and she and Vivian had come to Charing Cross to meet him. They had never been apart for so long a time since their marriage. Mary was a little tremulous; Vivian was frankly excited, showing an eagerness for the arrival of the train that had to be repressed again and again, until—twenty minutes late—it rolled into the hot closeness of the London station.

By every rule of fitness Gerard's mind should have been elsewhere as he crossed Hungerford Bridge and saw the blue-green waters of the Thames and the hard outlines of the Clock Tower against the evening sky—but it was not. He knew it was likely that his wife and one of his children would come to meet him, and he was unfeignedly glad at the prospect. He kissed Mary on both cheeks and lifted Vivian off her feet: she clung to him in her delight at his return. The newly acquired habits of five weeks were not however easily shaken off. Mary Blundell's plan had been that they should go at once to Waterloo and hurry home, but Gerard had become used to a more fluid life: "No, we'll have tea first. It's easy to leave these three things

in the cloak-room. Tell me, am I too shabby for the Carlton? Not at the end of July surely. *Allons-y!*"

"Why, Gerard, you've become quite a Frenchman," Mary said, and he smiled down at her and squeezed her arm and forgot everything but the pleasure of being back in London again with his children and his wife and the prospect of Pall Mall for the next morning.

The purchase of the ring that he had promised in Aix embarrassed Gerard not a little. Buying jewellery was not a habit to which he had ever succumbed. Certainly he had bought two rings in his life—one at the time of his engagement and another for his wedding—but this must be a different affair altogether. When he won Mary he was young and poor. He was not exactly rich now—he was a great deal poorer than he had been a couple of months ago, he thought with a grimace—but he did feel that circumstances and propriety alike demanded that if he was giving a ring to someone other than his wife after a month—five weeks—of unpaid-for happiness it should be a present worthy both of himself and of the emotions of which it was to be the symbol. "*Une jolie, tu sais,*" Illona had said, and looking at him roguishly she had added: "*quelque-chose de superbe!*" denying her own addition immediately by: "a simple ring, *chéri*, that I can wear always, always—I shall never take it off all my life, *je te jure.*"

The first rings that Gerard had bought came from the Army and Civil Service Stores. This new one came from a jeweller in Bond Street, a jeweller of whom Gerard was sure Illona would have heard. It was not

a gorgeous affair but it was costly: it would have made Mary's eyes open wide with astonishment. But as a matter of sober fact Mary's existence did not even cross Gerard's mind in the hour of its purchase. He was living over again, for the first and what was likely to be the last time, the emotions he had felt, and the happiness he had shared. Poor dear child—she had really loved him, and he had really loved her, loved her now indeed, although she had gone for ever out of his life, and although he had no wish, no strong wish, even to see her again. A wave of tenderness swept over him and he paused for a moment at the corner of Burlington Gardens, irresolute, deeply remembering. . . .

"*Aix—Le Lavandou: 1912,*" were the words that he ordered to be engraved on the inside of his gift. He refused to have it sent to him and the next day called for it, satisfied himself that the inscription was correctly spelt, waited while it was securely packed and then carried it across to the little post-office in Grosvenor Street. The eyes of the young lady who took it from him and gave him a receipt embarrassed him. Surely she would guess what the package contained. "Well, that's done," he said, "and it's all at an end—but I wonder where Illona is now." He looked at his watch. It was half-past two. Was she careering about the country with one or other of her English friends in some better car than he had been able to provide? Had she begun to forget him? He thought not. But she would forget. Such things did not last. And it was just as well. "*Pauvre chérie, pauvre enfant!*" he sighed and then straightway determined to think of her no more.

CHAPTER II

MARY BLUNDELL thought that her husband had never been quite so nice to her—no, not even in the first months after their marriage—as he was during that autumn and winter. He showed a solicitude for her health, an anticipation of her little wishes, a consideration for her habits, which made her feel younger and happier than she had been for years. The children too—their father seemed determined to give them a good time. He and Mary went to more theatres, they dined in London more often, even sometimes they went and returned all the way in the comfort of a car. She supposed that he must be making more money and that for some reason the cares of business preyed on him less. Certainly he had the airs of a younger man. She praised Aix to her friends, and would tell them of her own stupid insistence on the economical advantages of Contrexéville and of her husband's greater wisdom in refusing to listen to her. Above all, it was good to have a husband who showed a dozen times in the day that he thought about her and thought for her. It was like putting the clock back. . . .

Months reasonably happy followed one another.

Autumn waned, Christmas passed, the trade in wine was remarkably good—in Pall Mall at least—Spring began to show green in the black squares and dreary parks. Gerard was content. So all his future should be if the choice lay with him. In March, on a sunny day that invited a riot of blood, that called for adventure, he walked up to Cook's and brought away with him a pamphlet about Circular Tours in Italy. Why shouldn't he and Mary go to Florence for Easter? Why not indeed? He had worked hard for six months. He could be spared from the office. He kept the pamphlet on his desk; for the moment he forbore to speak of his project at home.

The next day, arriving at his work a few minutes later than usual—there had been fog on the line—he found Mathews regarding the more private residue of the morning's post with a depressed air.

"Anything the matter, Mathews?"

"Yes, the deuce and all's the matter. There, look for yourself." He tossed a letter, deeply black-edged, across for Gerard's inspection.

Gerard read that their Paris representative was dead—had died suddenly the previous day: a clot of blood apparently. His widow was desolate, but she had had the sense to write at once to inform her husband's employers. What was she to do?

That Pontifex, Mathews and Blundell should have a Paris representative and a Paris office, that they should find it worth their while, was a continuing source of wonder to their competitors. What useful purpose did the Paris branch serve? Very little, it was supposed. It was in a sense a survival. The firm was an old one and

it had found an agent very convenient several generations ago, when the means of communication were neither so sure nor so expeditious as they are to-day. One of the first Pontifexes liked living in the Paris of the eighteenth-thirties. He had had a fine and very English taste in wine, a pretty wit, knew everyone and went nearly everywhere; and he had managed to do a considerable trade in French wines among those of his countrymen whom misfortune or duty kept in the French capital and who preferred to do business with an Englishman who understood their requirements, and in Spanish and Portuguese wines, not only with the English colony but with such foreigners as made it a point of honour to follow the English fashions. He had also acted as a half-way house between the growers and shippers of Dijon, Bordeaux and Rheims and his firm in London. Nowadays certainly, the old national prejudices were being broken down and less actual sales were effected in the Paris office in the rue Cambon, but it remained a question of pride with the house to keep its flag flying on the banks of the Seine. It was convenient to have, a day nearer the sources of production, a man who knew the business and who was generally able to secure the first offer of any really promising bargain before even their existence had been bruited about among the firm's competitors in London. The Paris office could have been closed and most of the displaced business could have been transacted in London without any great disadvantage; but as it had been kept open much routine and other work was done within its doors, and especially was it used for the business that

the firm did with the French vineyards and the French shippers.

Mathews waited until Gerard had finished reading: "Now what shall we do?"

"Don't ask me, my dear fellow. You know if I had my way I'd shut down in the rue Cambon—I'd have done it years ago. It's your funeral. You'd better go over and bury Groves and console his widow and decide what's to be done on the spot."

"What's the good of talking like that? I'm sure Pontifex won't hear of our closing the place even now, although he knows I'm rather inclined to agree with you that it costs more than it's worth. Groves at least understood the business and he got on with everyone. God knows what we shall do without him. One thing's certain: we can't give his job to anyone who's there now—we'll have to get a man from outside. It's a hell of a nuisance." The telephone bell rang and Gerard went to his own room. He knew all about the Paris branch because more and more of the work of the firm passed through his hands. Pontifex wore his silk hat and his whiskers with an air and no doubt helped the house along by his presence, but he no longer paid any sustained attention to business; while Mathews was a good fellow but a little soft, hypochondriac, sententious: he wore a striped collar and had a high-coloured face; he thought more of his health and of his clothes than of his work in Pall Mall.

On that day Pontifex and Mathews lunched together. They came back a few minutes before Gerard

who had been lunching with his wife and had been helping her to choose a new hat. "Mr Pontifex would like to see you, sir—the moment you came in, he said," the office boy told him.

Pontifex sat behind his big desk and smoked a big cigar. Mathews had his back to the fire and sucked at a cigarette through an over-long amber mouthpiece. A curious and intelligent observer might have seen at a glance to what weaknesses Gerard owed his growing ascendancy in the counsels of the firm.

"Blundell, my boy, I'm afraid this business in Paris is going to be a nuisance. No sooner do we get over one worry than we have another. Clot of blood! Groves—
' Good God!—why couldn't he have taken care of himself? He was young enough too. Still, we can't help it now. What's to be done? Mathews and I have been talking it over. We oughtn't to decide in a hurry. Let's look about. But in the meantime—that's the question. I'll tell you what we'd better do: young what's-his-name?—Devereux—can manage the ordinary routine work over there: he's been on the spot two years: he ought to know all about it. That'll settle the customers. But the other work's more difficult to arrange. Look here: you'd better go over once a week or so through the summer. What do you say to that? Perhaps it'll amuse you. Gad, when I was a young fellow I'd have liked it!"

"Well, *I* shan't, Pontifex; don't make any mistake about that. But I'll go, of course, if it's necessary. With Groves dead though, and if we aren't going to have any-one in his place, once a week won't be too often. My wife will be pleased—I don't think!" It may be observed that

with Gerard evil communications had corrupted his good manners.

Pontifex had been married, but he had not much sympathy with matrimony: "A wine merchant oughtn't to have a wife," he proclaimed; "his job's a job for a single man. How's a married man to keep his palate? How's he--oh, but it doesn't matter. We'll overcome Mrs Blundell's reluctance--eh, Mathews? Ladies like Paris; the house'll pay for some visits for Mrs Blundell too. But we needn't decide about it to-day. Talk it over at home, Blundell, and we'll see what can be done. In the meantime I'll write to Mrs Groves and to Devereux, and--yes, I think I'll go over to the funeral. I ought to, I suppose; he's been with us how long? Nearly thirty years here and in Paris. And there's Mrs Groves--we may have to do something for her. Luckily she's French; she's among friends. If I go I'll be able to see if she's provided for. And now I'm due at the Automobile. Don't forget those Bordeaux bills, Mathews."

CHAPTER III

THE idea that he would have to spend once a week for the next six months the greater part of a couple of days on the journey between London and Paris did not attract Gerard Blundell, but in the absence of any better way of coping with the difficulty that had arisen he loyally determined to do as his partners had suggested. He realised that of the three he was the man for the job. It was true that Mathews was unmarried, but he was very much older and he was fussily dependent on his habits. Nevertheless Mary was not likely to approve the plan. She preferred a quiet and normal life. And what was to happen to their Italian trip? He would have to give that up. Mary did not like Paris, so it would not be a treat for her to accompany him as Pontifex had suggested.

But when, over dinner that evening, Gerard told his wife what had happened she cheered up instead of becoming depressed. "It isn't often that things fit in so nicely as this promises to do," she said. "I got a letter yesterday from Clara, Gerard." (Clara was her younger sister, married to a major in the Indian army.) "Harry's got some sort of staff appointment and has to

be at home for the summer. They are starting about now, and of course they'll bring the children. She asks me to take a furnished house for them—near here, she says. They want a house like this one. Why shouldn't we let them The Haven?"

"And what should we do?" Gerard was not greatly surprised at his wife's suggestion, for he knew that when she formed some idea for his or the children's comfort she usually kept it to herself until she saw some way of putting it into effect.

"Listen: you've got, you say, to go to Paris practically every week for the present. That means you'll be away at least two nights out of the seven. We have both of us thought how much we wanted the children to learn French. They're not doing that at school. Why shouldn't we take them over to France for the summer—not to Paris itself but to some place quite close: Versailles or St Cloud? I shouldn't like it very much, but it would be good for them. We couldn't afford it if we had this house on our hands, but anyhow Clara will pay us more than a little house in France would cost us. We'd leave the cook here, but we'd take Ellen; we can easily get a French-woman over there."

"But what about their school?"

"It won't do them any harm to miss the one term. They're so young. Really being able to talk French will make up for that, and we can get a day-governess for them if necessary."

"But poor Dickie will miss his cricket; he's so proud of that."

Mary smiled. "Cricket isn't everything: he'll get lots of other things in exchange."

"And how long is this to last?"

"Clara will prefer to come straight here. I'll have to settle her in. . . . We could go to France in four weeks from to-day and we could stop till the beginning of the autumn term."

It was Gerard's turn to smile. "You're a wonder, Mary: no doubt you've had this idea in your mind quite vaguely and as something quite impossible of realisation, and then no sooner do I supply the missing link than everything falls into its place and you have your scheme complete to its least detail. I ought to be used to your efficiency by now, but I never shall be."

Mary flushed with pleasure. She loved praise; she liked recognition. "And as for you, poor dear, I daresay you'll have just as much travelling, but it will be to London instead of to Paris. You'll spend your two or three days a week in Pall Mall instead of the French office and the rest of the time you can be with us. Of course, I hate the horrid going to and fro, but that has to be anyhow. So tell Mr Pontifex that you were quite wrong about me and that I am delighted at the idea. All you need do is to find a house for us when you go over. I'll write out a list of what we must have and you can see a Paris house-agent about it, and by the time you are there again he can have a lot of places for you to look at."

Gerard had nothing to say against his wife's plan. It was radical, but it had advantages. Perhaps it would

not be necessary for him to return to London every week all through the summer.

When Mary Blundell took a thing in hand it was invariably carried through. She liked detail and she loved arranging. In Pall Mall they approved of Gerard taking up his residence in Paris. It would show the trade that the house had no intention of allowing its French connection to weaken. It was not at all unlikely that he need only come back once a fortnight: he would be able to judge when he got hold of Groves's work. Clara Warwick and her husband were delighted that they were to have *The Haven* instead of the home of some stranger. Gerard found almost at the first attempt the very place to suit them: a bosky little house just above the higher station at St Cloud, with all the accommodation they needed, a bathroom, a balcony that looked out through a curtain of trees over a hundred gardens to the winding Seine, and a garden of its own full of lilac and acacia. Mary had no fault to find with his choice, and as for the children, they ran to and fro exploring every corner of house and garden and daring each other to penetrate into the kitchen, in which a pleasant-faced Frenchwoman was scouring her pots and pans and from which they would return exploding with laughter at the effect of their queer French phrases.

A steamboat took Gerard to his work in the morning. He started earlier and returned earlier than had been his habit in England. In the evening they all talked French; they tried to forget England and that they

were English. "Daddy wants us to learn French, so we'd better be French children all the time we're awake," Vivian had decided, and she had invented some penalty to be imposed on herself and her brothers if they lapsed back into their native tongue. Altogether life was great fun.

Nor was the work in the rue Cambon uninteresting. Gerard found it a change after the very different routine in Pall Mall. He liked the Frenchmen who came to see him, and they in their turn showed that they preferred to do their business with a principal. Devereux too proved very efficient. The journeys to London were a bore, but they took place less often than he had feared. Indeed there was plenty to do in Paris. Groves had died unexpectedly and had been to the office regularly up to the day of his death, but things had fallen sadly into arrear and Gerard had much leeway to make up. In the late afternoon Mary would sometimes meet him and they would dine quietly *chez* Lucas or at a Duval and go to the theatre. She did not like the plays but she put up with the features that displeased her for the sake of the good French of the actors. They had no friends in Paris and they led an uneventful life. Later on things would be more lively: people had promised to come over to see them; the Warwicks talked about a week in Paris; Gerard's brother, Gervase, had had the Paris habit for years.

It was not Gerard's way to make friends easily. The heads of the firms with which they did business called on him and were quick to offer him hospitality. He smiled pleasantly and asked to be allowed to put off

these pleasures until he had had time to settle in. Then a day came when he had to accept an invitation. One Henri Metivet, a Bordeaux merchant who came to Paris once a week, insisted that Gerard must dine with him and go to the play, and would take no excuse. Metivet seemed a good fellow, intelligent, interested in other things than his trade, hardly older than Gerard, but fat and self-indulgent in appearance, a man who took the easy things of life, things of good and evil repute, with open hands, and to whom any self-denial seemed a lunacy, a useless, unjustifiable deprivation.

"We'll dine at Viel's and go afterwards to the Marigny," he said; and Gerard had told Mary, and had added that he would take the train home from the Gare Saint Lazare, that he would be back no doubt soon after midnight but that she was not to worry if he was later. It would not indeed have been in Mary's character to worry. She knew that she could trust her husband absolutely, that she could trust both his conduct and his judgment in all that pertained to his work. Her sense of duty told her that what he wanted to do he no doubt ought to do. She confined her criticism to things about which she held she had as good a right to an opinion as he had, things in which they were jointly concerned, the matters of their partnership, so to speak. So on the evening of his dinner he went home to dress, came back by train, met Metivet at the Chatham, drank a cocktail without liking it, and walked across the Boulevard to Viel's, where they had a comfortable table and where the dinner was of the kind a worldly Frenchman can com-

mand but the aspiring Englishman can only hope for. Metivet made an amusing companion. His ideas of life, his philosophy, were far, far away from his guest's, but his conversation had salt: he could tell a good story and did tell several, and he had a fund of gossip about the people they were later on to see and about that English-American-French world which lives in the limelight of newspaper notices. "I've got a box at the Marigny," he told Gerard, "so we needn't hurry. A man's going to join us there who'll interest you, I think: he's a doctor. I wanted him to dine but he couldn't. Afterwards we'll have supper somewhere and you'll see whether he isn't a good fellow."

Gerard demurred at the idea of supper. "I can't come to supper, I'm afraid," he said, "although it's awfully good of you. You see I live outside Paris and have to get home."

"That will be a pity—but we'll see. Where do you live? Far?"

"St Cloud."

"My dear fellow, St Cloud is Paris. A taxi and you're home in half an hour." Then he dropped the subject of supper.

Only the fact that he had had a very good dinner reconciled Gerard to the hours he was now to spend, and he regretted the inanity of the performance the more in that it prevented his talking to his fellow-guest. Docteur Xavier Bedier was the kind of man whom he liked to meet. But conversation in the Marigny was impossible, and even between the acts when they strolled up and down he found that to talk connectedly was out

of the question. Both Metivet and his French guest were interested in the people they saw, in the women who crowded the galleries and the terraces, some of whom they seemed to have known years ago before they had come down to this ante-penultimate rung on their ladder of pleasure. . . . After a time Metivet looked at his watch. "This is rather rot; we needn't stay till the end. What do you think, Bedier? My English friend here says he won't come to supper as he's got to get out to St Cloud. Help me to persuade him. Why you live half way to St Cloud—you're still near the Etoile, aren't you?—and he can drop you on the way. Now, Monsieur Blundell, please don't disappoint us."

Gerard seldom said no; it was always easier for him to do as he was asked; and, on this occasion, he certainly wanted to improve the doctor's acquaintance. To go by train to St Cloud was a tedious, lengthy business anyway. He could sup and, taking a taxi, could still get home at not so very much later a time than he had told his wife. He did not hear his host's directions to the chauffeur, but later, after driving a few minutes, Metivet asked him if he had been to the Trianon: "Of course you have: it lives on English visitors; there's hardly room for a Frenchman. Sometime it's amusing; it's a Friday, so it should be to-night."

The name of the place sounded familiar to Gerard but he could associate it with no memory. Nor would it make much difference: he wanted little to eat or drink; he wanted to hear Bedier talk; and he did not want to stop long.

CHAPTER IV

THE Trianon stands in a Place in Montmartre, bathed in its own insistent lights and the competing lights of the similar, less fashionable establishments with which it is faced and flanked. To-night the pavement outside its door was crowded by a small knot of curious poor people who had come to watch the ostentatious rich arrive in their gorgeous cars, to identify some beauty of the amusing world and to speculate on the value and reality of her jewels. As it was Friday the door itself was closed by an iron grille and guarded by a sturdy porter who recognised the habitual visitor and the client whose tip had been worth remembering, and who turned back with no uncertain phrases those unknowing ones who had omitted to clothe themselves for the evening. Metivet was recognised immediately and the gate was flung back for him. Gerard followed him up a few steps to where the *patron*, Victor, stood sorting out his guests according to their wealth and the beauty of the women who accompanied them. The restaurateur expressed his joy at seeing Monsieur Metivet and, pushing his waiters on one side to make room, took him at once to a table at the other

end of the big room, against the wall. There was a great noise and a great crowd; tables were set side by side; the waiters hardly had space to move. Gerard made a wry face to himself: he wouldn't be able to talk here; even the Marigny was better. Supper would be a battle, not a pleasant recreation. He wished he had kept to his first resolution and gone home. It was too late now. But he did not like his surroundings and he did not much like the look of the people he saw near him, raucous and overdressed, and he certainly winced at the atmosphere, loaded with ill perfumes and smoke. He felt no curiosity about the place. Evidently it was the supper restaurant of the moment and so, in consequence, it was a place in which in effect you could not sup. He insisted on his host and Docteur Bedier taking the inside places, noticing with some amusement that they had almost to sit in one another's pockets, so little room there was. He preferred to have his back to whatever was going on. He wished he could shut his ears to the insistent singing of a horrid negro.

Getting anything to eat was a slow business. Champagne seemed to be the only drink—Gerard was reminded of Aix-les-Bains and the Piccadilly—and it came long before the food. Everyone talked at the top of his voice and paid little attention to his plate. Metivet had ordered oysters—April was not yet out—and he was obviously in his element, greeting a dozen friends, pointing out people to Bedier, chattering their reputations away; he was quite oblivious of the fact that Gerard was not enjoying himself.

“You say you've never been here before, Monsieur

Blundell. That's odd. I thought every foreigner came here on the first evening he arrived in Paris—and I believe he does too: you're an exception, you know. But anyhow it's too fashionable, too crowded: it won't be amusing till half these people have gone home. Then they'll dance. In the meantime the discomfort begins."

Victor was making his way round the room with a sheaf of banners, souvenirs of the Trianon, mounted on high, gilded staffs. These he distributed to the ladies of each party and returned after a while with a cluster of balloons, gas-filled evidently, for they floated above his head. His clients tied them to the back of their chairs, to the rings of their champagne buckets. In the smoky light they made the room look like some garden of curious flowers. By now the wine had had its effect. The noise was greater than ever, and the confusion became worse confounded when little gelatine balls were brought in and poured liberally on every table. In a moment Gerard found himself the object of a lively fusilade from two tables on the other side of the room where his good looks and English air had attracted the attention of a party of not too sober Argentines. He was not pleased, and more than ever he wanted to get away. . . .

Supper continued through this pandemonium. Metivet insisted that they must take their time. "Really the dancing here is good. Look, people are going already. They'll clear away all those middle tables in a minute or two. Half the dances in the world begin here." He certainly was enjoying his evening, and

so too was Bedier, who would talk sensibly to Gerard for a few minutes and then incontinently forget his wisdom and start playing the fool.

"Ah, here they come, the darlings." Metivet told Gerard to look round. From behind the orchestra were drifting out into the room half a dozen *danseuses*, fairly pretty some of them, young or youngish, but hard-faced, worn. Three were Spanish; there was a Spanish man too. Gerard pretended interest and then turned back to his plate. He had seen dancers in a restaurant before.

"Oh, there's Dedie—catch her eye, Bedier, if you can. I want to talk to her."

"Don't fear, old man, she'll see you soon enough. They have eyes in the back of their heads, that kind. I bet she's known you are here for the last hour"; and sure enough, the girl at whom they had both been looking turned at this moment as if she had caught her name and came over, tossing from her ears the mane of yellow hair that some careful hand had taken an hour or so to fluff out, and smiling all over her rather good-natured face.

"Why, Monsieur, it is an age since you have been here. We thought you had forsaken us or were dead."

"Sit down, Dedie, and tell me how you are. You won't mind, will you, Monsieur Blundell? Just move an inch or two; that's right."

"Well, how's business, Dedie?"

"Rotten, my dear: Montmartre is finished. And anyhow nobody has any money, or if they have they don't bring it here. I give you my word I haven't seen a hundred-franc note for a month."

"Then you shall to-night, Dedie: there's one for you. I'm inclined to think I owe it you anyhow. Now don't lose it."

"No fear."

"Tell me all the news. Are all the old lot here? Where's Angèle?"

"In Russia—making heaps of money; she went off with the fat man from Odessa who got so mad about her—I forget his name. But it didn't last, and now she's in St Petersburg, and has a necklace worth a hundred thousand francs."

Gerard ceased to listen. He had been formally introduced to Dedie and had bowed, and she had looked him over and had come very suitably and evidently to the conclusion that he was of no use to her, that he was too serious, too English; and now she ignored his presence. He was glad. Somewhere in his heart, somewhere at the back of his consciousness, there was a sore place. For months he had forgotten that it had troubled him. To-night he had a bitter reminder—the noise, the gold-foiled wine in its frosted bucket, the mad music, and this girl with her powdered face, her candid and calculating eyes, brought back to him another face and other eyes. He thought of the past without either pleasure or regret, but with a sad sense of frustration, of waste. For a moment he closed his eyes. He had again, and more strongly, the wish to get away, to clear this foul atmosphere from his brain, to start for home, to be back with his children and his wife.

". . . We don't know what's the matter with her. Ever since she came back she's been altogether different.

You know how gay she was. She isn't gay now. Victor would put her out if it wasn't that people still ask for her and if he hadn't known her ever since she began, and liked her a great deal too, *tu sais*—more perhaps because she would never have anything to do with him. And she's getting *laide*—thin, my dear: you should see. But she's here—she'll be out directly. Someone said she was in love, but that's *blague*. She's not in love. She's got a heart of steel. Something's the matter with her though. All her cheek has gone, and she gets angry for nothing. Oh yes, she dances just as well, but—well, men don't want to dance with her so much; she isn't like before. *Elle ne gagne plus autant d'argent*. It's a pity: she's been a good *copine* to all of us, and she used—you remember—to lead in everything. *Elle est un peu plus fine que les autres, et je l'aime beaucoup—ça fait mal au cœur de la voir dans la purée.*"

Vaguely Gerard heard Dedie's sentences about her friend, and they interested him not at all. He was sick at heart. . . .

Then Metivet spoke: "There she is—she's seen us. *Mon dieu, t'as raison, Dedie!* How she's changed!"

A slim white hand stretched over Gerard's shoulder and Metivet took and held it for a minute: "How goes everything, Illona? Come here and sit down: we'll make room somehow."

A sudden draught of ice-cold air seemed to pass through Gerard's heart. He could not see the newcomer but he needed neither to see her nor to hear her speak to know who she was; he hardly needed to see

the ring that trembled for a moment in the light as she drew back her hand. The blood grew bitter in his veins.

“ . . . I'll come directly, my dear. You look well. And Docteur Bedier too. How is the little Margot, Docteur? You ought to have brought her. I return at once”—and she tripped off. Gerard turned to look after her. Indeed her friend had reason. Thin, thin she was: the Illona he had known and loved and fondled had lessened, had shrunk. What would her face be like? He feared to see her. Could he slip away now? But Metivet, speaking in English, claimed his hearing: “ Ah, Monsieur, I'd like you to talk to that girl. She speaks English. She is the nicest of all on Montmartre. She dances like an angel, but all the same she's out of place here. The others—well, it's their *métier*, but she's different. She's altered now, and you perhaps won't see how clever she is, and gay—although I have my doubts whether she is ever very gay in her heart. I fell in love, really in love, with her once, but she wouldn't have anything to do with me, turned me down good and hard, as you'd say. She's more serious than the others, ever so much—and I used to think it was worth spending night after night on Montmartre just to see her. I gave up coming here when she got angry with me. She has forgotten now. I hope I'd like to help her if she is really in a hole.”

“ I am sure she will interest me, Monsieur—but I didn't see more of her just now than her back.” Gerard spoke lightly but he spoke with difficulty: his mouth was dry.

BITTERSWEET

"Here I am. You are sure you've room for me? Dedie, your Austrian banker, redder and fatter than ever, wants you. *Va t'en!* Ah, that's better. *Mon dieu*, how tired I am! Quick, give me something to drink—waiter, a glass! Oh yes, Docteur, I remember what you told me, but what would you have me do? I must keep up. Perhaps I'm getting old. Champagne is all I take anyway. Now, laugh; don't look so grave: I'm not dead yet—*à votre santé, et à la mienne aussi!*"

"Illona, you must include my friend. Monsieur Blundell, this is Mademoiselle Illona, the best dancer, the prettiest girl, and the kindest heart on all Montmartre—in all Paris."

Illona turned and looked at Gerard: the name had startled her evidently, had prepared her even. Gerard saw her pale under her paint and white powder; for a moment he thought she would faint and he was glad of it; he liked to see that he had still power over her, unhappy though he was to find her so changed and still in the same world.

Quickly she pulled herself together:

"Why, I know Monsieur Blundell already; we are old friends, *n'est ce pas*, Monsieur? But it's long ago and perhaps he doesn't remember me. Yes? I'm changed; isn't that so?"

Gerard answered with a suitable compliment. Indeed though, he could see that she had changed. Her face had not lost its youth, but it was more finely drawn; the clouded sadness of her eyes had grown even deeper than in those days, now ten months ago, when he had first been attracted by her sombre beauty; her mouth

was set and her lips were pressed together hardly; it was as if sorrow had marked her for its own.

Evidently she did not wish him to talk even lightly about the past for she quickly turned the conversation from their old acquaintance to the things in which she and her host were interested: the fortunes of Montmartre, of the Trianon, her own doings, her friends. She professed to be satisfied with life, content with what the seasons brought her. On the previous day she had been to Versailles. Her friend's car had been stopped for furious driving. That amused her. "I tell him to go faster and faster. That's what an auto is for. *J'aime beaucoup la vitesse, moi.* He can pay the fine: he's rich enough. And when we'd lunched we went into the Musée. No, I hadn't been there before. I sat down on all the chairs—I liked that. They told me not to, but why shouldn't I? I've sat in the chair of Marie Antoinette now, and Louis Quatorze too. The guardian wasn't pleased—oh, no indeed! He said he'd put me outside the door. I laughed at him and then it was all right. Now, I must go. I must dance. *Il faut que je gagne beaucoup d'argent ce soir.* You dance with me, Docteur? No. *Blague ça:* it's because Margot would hear and be jealous. Not of me, she wouldn't. You belong to her; I know that. But she's right: never trust a woman, not even your best friend—nor a man either. I forget whether you dance, Monsieur Blundell? You should learn. Dedic will teach you. She likes teaching Englishmen, and she's very pretty."

Metivel spoke: "We'll keep this place for you, Illona. Come back quickly."

"Not to-night, my dear. I'm busy to-night. To-morrow perhaps."

Metivet made a further remark to keep her for a moment and fumbled in his pocket. Gerard could see that he had notes in the palm of his hand and that he was trying to give them to her under cover of his good-bye. She almost brushed aside the concealment in pushing away his hand: "No, I wasn't serious. Really I haven't any need. Not from you anyway. I told you that before. You have a short memory, Monsieur Metivet. It doesn't matter though; it's better to have a good heart. Now, au revoir—au revoir, Docteur; adieu, Monsieur Blundell."

"Fancy your knowing Illona, Monsieur. I won't ask where. Sometimes it is well to be discreet." Metivet laughed good-naturedly.

Gerard blushed. "It isn't a case for discretion. I used sometimes to go to a place at Aix where your friend danced; that's all."

"Well you're lucky, for she's really a nice girl. But, *mon dieu*, she has changed; she isn't exactly older, but she looks as if she was eating her heart out over something, *pauvre enfant*. But, after all, it's none of my business, nor yours either, Bedier. Waiter, another bottle! I haven't been here since the night of the last Grand Prix—and to think I used to come day after day! It's that girl's fault that I've been so serious. It's finished now though." He sighed, and then, shaking his head as if to dispel some hovering thoughts, looked round to find some pretty woman at whom to throw the little balls that had accumulated in front of him.

Bedier in the meantime had struck up or was continuing an acquaintance with the people at the next table. Gerard was left to his memories.

His memories were sad, and they were difficult to arrange in any sequence which would make them more pleasant. He tried to recall the happier hours at Aix, at Talloires, at Le Lavandou, Illona's laughter, her gay talk, her careless running to and fro in the sun. He failed. All that came vividly into his mind was her tear-stained face in that corner of the wood above Les Charmettes, and her poor, sad, broken little figure on the platform at Mâcon. How much he had loved her! How much he had longed to cherish her, to keep her in his life! . . . And now she had hardly a word for him. All that had happened between them had become a mere episode in her career. There had been others like it perhaps. But no: she was broken still; her face had s 'll the stricken look that it had when he left her. A cry of hers came into his mind: "Oh, Gerard, what shall I do, what shall I do, when you are gone? I think I shall die." Could it be that truly she had remembered through all these months? Had she been grieving for him?

Sitting now in this crowded, heated, noisy restaurant Gerard tried to collect and arrange his thoughts. Yes, he knew that he had been piqued, more than piqued, at her seeming carelessness when she greeted him, but, after all, he told himself, it was a carelessness of words only; she had paled when she saw him. That, though, might mean much or little. One thing alone seemed clear: she showed no wish to see him again, to draw him back to

her. Certainly this was all of a piece with her character, with what she had said to him before they parted. She had forbidden him to write to her. Still, if she had truly loved him his hold on her should have been strong enough to overcome all her hesitation. Yes, he wanted her again—at least he wanted to learn the truth, to test his power. And she had been ill, and she was *dans la purée*, whatever that might mean exactly. He must see her again and be free to talk to her. At the least perhaps he could help her. And he could find out, he must find out, whether she yet cared for him. That learned, he could rest content—and it should be easy to learn.

He moved in his chair so as to look for the girl in the crowded room, in which men, women and colours swayed to and fro, changed their partners, pulsated as in one of the toy kaleidoscopes of our childhood. He saw her at last: she was dancing in the arms of a tall Englishman with a scrubby yellow moustache, a gentleman evidently, but a rather drunk gentleman; he talked as he danced and as they swung round near Gerard's chair he gave the impression of urging something on his partner; suddenly Gerard saw him bend forward and kiss her on the mouth, and, although she drew her head back and shook it, she seemed not greatly vexed. When they passed near him again, Gerard fancied that she kept her eyes averted with intention. He had the impulse to stop her dancing and to claim her. . . .

The dance at an end, Illona retreated to a passage behind the orchestra and disappeared. He wondered if he could follow her and then, watching its entrance, he realised that it led to some cloak-room or lavatory.

Everybody used it. Nothing need prevent his doing so, and getting up, he walked across the room, his pulses beating, anxiety in his heart.

At the end of the passage he found Illona. She was powdering her face and her back was to him, but she saw him in the glass at the moment he saw her. Quickly she turned: "Why do you come here?" They were alone save for the presence of the old lady of the place, the *dame du lavabo*, who is so essential a feature of the night restaurant. "I don't want you. Please go; go at once."

She spoke with agitation and in English. The old lady paid no kind of attention to his presence. Before Gerard could reply another dancer came and a girl who was not a dancer. They hardly looked at him. "*Tiens, Illona, va cocotte*; I want to see you—you'll be at the Esqueline afterwards, eh?" the girl asked.

Illona nodded in response and then turned again to Gerard: "Go now; don't talk to me. I am not fit to talk to-night."

"But I *must* talk to you. Not here, though. I won't go till you've told me when and where I can see you. I insist on that. I needn't keep you. To-morrow it must be—anywhere, anywhere you like, but I *will* have it."

"I won't come; I don't wish to see you again. If it's an accident your being here to-night let it be the only time. I don't want you any more. I don't care for you. I don't want to remember. Adieu . . . adieu!"

Gerard answered with all the strength he could command: "I insist—we can't talk here, and I must talk to

you and learn how you are. A minute perhaps. And then not again, I promise you. Now, where shall it be?"

"Gerard, you are *brute*, but this time if I must, I must: you are stronger than me. Come—come to the Brasserie Wepler, in the Place Clichy at—at one o'clock to-morrow. Now go—oh, Gerard, go, go—*please*."

That his will had conquered was a source of immediate and infinite satisfaction to Gerard, but all the time pity welled up in his heart, and he felt a brute. He felt too that he was playing with fire, running risks, inviting trouble. He looked at Illona and she looked at him—defiantly, angrily, as if daring him to do his worst. He went back to his table. Metivet and his friend showed no sign of having missed him. After a little while he felt that he could without impropriety take his leave. Docteur Bedier seemed to have forgotten that he was to accompany Gerard on the way home.

Illona had made no fresh appearance. Gerard went out into the cool air of the Place and called a taxi. That he should want to go as far as St Cloud seemed to have no terrors for the chauffeur. Saying that he wished to be dropped at the upper station, he sank back into his corner. He felt shaken. His heart was not glad that he had found Illona again, but now he knew that he must learn how she was, what she was doing, whether she was happy, whether she remembered him. Why was she thinner? Why did she look as if she had been ill? Why had her friend described her as *dans la purée*? He would see her once and would learn the truth.

CHAPTER V

THE restaurant at which Illona had given her appointment was a thriving, bustling place, and big too. Gerard searched through its crowded rooms and then sat down facing the door, shy that people should realise that he was waiting for someone, for a woman surely, who did not come. He watched the entrance anxiously. Perhaps she would not come. After all, he had forced her promise. From his seat he could see the taxis approach and pass or stop and put down or pick up passengers in whom he could take not even a moment's interest. One o'clock went by and then the quarter. Gerard sat on and on, eating his heart. At last just before the half hour she arrived, arrived on foot, almost furtively, inconspicuous, simply not smartly dressed; she drifted to his side, gave him her hand, and smiled wanly. In the daylight he saw again how greatly she had changed. Her eyes frightened him. Sombre they had always been, and sad, but now sorrow and anxiety and disillusion were all that they showed. It was as if they had never known laughter.

And now that she was at his side Gerard knew not what to say. He had so much to ask and was at a loss

for a beginning. It seemed monstrous that they should meet in this manner after so long ; it seemed monstrous that he should not put his arms round her, draw her to his shoulder and kiss the anxiety from her eyes.

“Well, you wanted to see me. I am here. What is it? You promised it should be quickly over. I did not want to come, Gerard: you know it. You forced me to.”

“I couldn’t help it, Illona. My coming last night to the Trianon was an accident ; I had no idea you were there ; I wasn’t searching for you.”

She smiled bitterly : “I am sure of that ; it was easy to see : I know you weren’t looking for me. But you’ve found me now and I’m here because you asked me to come. And I am very, very busy and must go at once.”

Here, with people on both sides of him, people who he fancied were already beginning to regard them curiously, it was impossible to talk. “Illona, I have so much I want to say to you, but I can’t do it in this place. Cannot we go somewhere where we shall be alone? Have you had your luncheon, dear? Couldn’t we go to a real restaurant and have a private room?” His suggestion was thrown out with perfect frankness. He wanted to be alone with her because only if they were quite alone would he feel free to talk, unconstrained.

She looked at him inquiringly and narrowed her eyes : “No, we won’t have a private room, but we’ll go close here, if you like, to a place where it’s likely to be quiet—Au Père Boivin. I have had all the lunch I want ; I am only just out of bed ; but you can say what you want to say while they are getting your meal ready, and then

I can go." Her voice had a note of restrained bitterness which puzzled Gerard.

Père Boivin has given his name to a little old-fashioned eating-place of which too few remain even in Paris. In the room to the right and at its end Gerard found a screened-off corner. He begged Illona to share his meal, but again she refused: "Gerard, understand: I don't want to lunch with you; I didn't want to see you. You have something you must say to me. *Bien!* Say it quickly. Then let me go."

But Gerard did not understand. He looked at the girl, and her very anxiety to get away from him, to avoid him, fanned the flames of his old love, his old passion, for her. If she had shown delight or even a little pleasure at seeing him again; if she had come running to him; if she had talked of the past with regret that it was past—why then he might have let her go. But her independence created in his heart a determination to break it down. She had loved him, and he had not changed in this period of less than a year. He had not treated her badly. She surely loved him still, or she should love him again. If not, then he would learn the reason for her altered mind.

"Illona, my dear little one: surely now that I have found you you have more to say to me than that. I am not an ordinary acquaintance. I loved you, sweetheart—and I love you still; I have never forgotten you; I have never forgotten the hours we spent together. But you told me not to write to you, and, later, I knew you would have left Aix—or I would have written in spite of what you said: I didn't know your address."

"If you had really wanted to write you could have found out my address easily enough. But we need not talk about that. You didn't write—because I told you not to! We had our amusement and it ended at Mâcon. Leave me alone now. I am no longer amusing to you. I don't feel like a *jouet*, but all the same that is what I am. I won't be a *jouet* to you though."

"Sweetheart, do not be bitter. Tell me, dear, what has happened to you. Why were you ill? Why are you so much thinner? Please, dear, tell me about yourself—all that has happened since we parted."

"Nothing has happened. I am thinner—well, that will pass. I went back to Aix and I danced and I came back to Paris and I danced and now I am going to St Petersburg to dance. *Voilà tout!* I have not been ill."

Her hands were on the table in front of her, nervously tearing at the little silk bag that she carried. Gerard took one of them between his own. "Why, your hand is cold, Illona. And I can see, *chérie*, that if you haven't been ill you haven't been happy. Your eyes look as they did that day above Chambéry, and as if you have cried often. Tell me, dear, have you been unhappy? Don't you care for me enough still to let me be your friend?"

"Your friend! Oh—" She bit her under-lip. "Yes, you might be my friend perhaps, but I have no room and no time for men friends. So let me go. I am starting at once for St Petersburg, so you can spare yourself the trouble of looking for me at the Trianon; Marinelli has just arranged an engagement for me." She seemed hardly to notice that he held her hand,

and Gerard could see that tears were collecting in her eyes.

"Illona, you can't so easily forget all that we were to one another; it isn't possible." He seized her other hand and held them both tight, compelling her attention, holding her prisoner. "I want to recapture all those days, to live again all that happiness. *Je t'aime, Illona, beaucoup, beaucoup—plus que jamais, tu sais*"—he broke into one of those artless French phrases in which she had always taken a child's delight.

"If you had really loved me you would never have left me there at Mâcon *comme un petit chien abandonné*. Pah!—that for your love! You never loved me. I know what love is, me."

"But, dear, you told me not to write; I had to do what you told me."

"Had to—had to! Well, you're English of course. You loved me so much that you let me go!" And then suddenly her strength seemed to give way and her head tumbled to the table between her arms, and once again Gerard could see her shoulders shake with silent sobs.

It was at this bitter moment that the waiter chose to bring Gerard's first dish. He was not at all taken aback at the lady's behaviour. He deposited his charge without turning a hair. Such things happen in public more often in Paris. Gerard who had ordered his meal in desperation looked at the *andouillettes* on his plate and wondered whether he should try to eat them. No, it would be impossible; he stretched out his hand to the carafe of wine, poured out a full glass, and drank it.

Still Illona wept. He watched her, caressing her arm the while. Then she looked up :

“Gerard, I am ill. Be kind to me. Call a taxi and send me home. I am not strong enough now for such scenes. You have learned all you wanted to know. Let me go. *J’ai mal au cœur*. Please, Gerard—please.”

He called the waiter, ordered a cab, explained that after all he would eat nothing, paid the bill and took Illona out into the street. “I won’t let you go alone, dear. You say you’re ill.”

“You shall not come with me. I don’t wish that you know where I live. No, let me go.”

“I’ll take you, and I’ll swear never to come to see you unless you tell me to—I swear it, Illona.”

“*Bien* ; tell him Square Moncey—number 31. I trust you, Gerard.”

She had ceased to cry ; her eyes were dry. She cowered rather than sat in her own corner of the cab and looked fixedly at the street. Gerard tried to speak to her, but she seemed not to hear. Arrived at her house, she refused to let him take her to the door of her apartment. He pleaded to be allowed to see her again. She shook her head.

“It is useless, my dear. It’s all finished between us now. *Laisse moi tranquille*. In three or four days I shall be in Russia. No, I’m not really ill ; only tired. Now, adieu.”

He seized her hand and held it. “I promised not to come here to you, but you must try to let me see you. I shall be so anxious until I hear. Here—see : this is my card, with my address ; I live in Paris now ; you

can telephone or you can write and I'll come anywhere at once. It is my bureau."

Illona took the card and slipped it into her bag. Then without another word she left him.

Gerard walked as in a dream down the rue Blanche, across the Place de la Trinité and to his office. He had been profoundly affected, stirred, by meeting the girl again, moved far more than he knew, and chagrined too by her apparent insensibility to his love. Somehow, sometime, he must see her again and must make her believe that he had loved and did still love her; and if it was possible he must cure her sorrow. But then in a day or two she was off to St Petersburg, she had said. Perhaps that wasn't true. . . .

CHAPTER VI

FOUR days later Gerard found among the letters that awaited him at his office one whose handwriting was strange to him but which he opened with the certainty that it was from Illona. He was right :

“ *Mon cher ami* : I have tried not to see you but *c'est plus fort que moi*. I will see you. You can come here to-morrow if you will—at three o'clock. I wish to learn about you before I go away. But it is only to be this once, Gerard. I have been ill, and I have not danced, and I rest in bed all day. Be *gentil* with me when you come and do not permit yourself to stop long. ILLONA.”

The rather hard-faced middle-aged woman who opened the door to Gerard showed him into a little salon, clean and rather untidy. A small piano stood open and some music was littered over the keys ; on a chair were papers of a few days old. Some flowers were dying on the mantelpiece, and on it stood also a pretentious clock half an hour fast and a dozen photographs, mostly of women, some in theatrical costumes, some in ordinary dress, but all inscribed affectionately : “ *à ma meilleure*

copine," and so on. There were not many books: a volume of Verlaine's poems assorted oddly with "Les Trois Légionnaires" and "La Petite Cady." On the walls hung some bad flower paintings and a large photograph of a beautiful woman in the clothes of Victoria's time. The windows, curtained so that one could hardly see into the courtyard, were tightly closed. Gerard would have opened one of them, but he was afraid; certainly there was not enough air in the flat. How could she expect to be well if she didn't keep her windows open!

For twenty minutes he sat or walked about the room. *Le Journal* of five days ago had no interest for him. He could hear noises and occasionally footsteps sounded in the hall, but he heard no voices. The room in which he was had three doors. He felt inclined to see where they led, but he remembered how in his own villa at St Cloud room opened into room, and he shrank from the risk.

"Madame wishes you to come this way, Monsieur."

It was evidently a very small flat. The room next to that in which he had been sitting was, he could see, a dining-room: on the table were a sewing-machine and a heap of material. Next to it was the room he was to enter. It was a bedroom and Illona was in bed, her face more pale, more ivory than ever against the white of the pillow, her hair braided, her hands tired on the coverlet. She had evidently kept him waiting while she was made neat to receive him.

"Well, Gerard, you have had your way. You are here, you see. I am ill, dear, but I shall go away on

Sunday. Before I went I wanted after all to see you once more, to learn how you are. That's all. I tried not to, but I couldn't help it."

Gerard felt tongue-tied. "The doctor—have you seen a doctor?" he managed to ask.

"A doctor—no, surely no. Jeanne wanted to fetch a doctor for me but I said I should put him *à la porte*. I have no confidence in doctors. They make love to you or they are ignorant. Anyhow they are useless."

"And St Petersburg. Why are you going there? Why do you go so far?"

"One makes much money in Russia, my dear, and I must make money. I don't make money here in Paris as I used. *C'est ma faute*: I am no longer gay. All that life disgusts me. Yes, in St Petersburg it will be the same, but it will be different too: I shall forget there."

"Forget what, Illona?"

She did not answer him, but her eyes searched his. She had hardly moved her head since he had come into the room. She looked too tired for movement.

"Forget what, Illona?"

"I shall forget Paris and all that makes me miserable here; I shall forget my childhood and all that I looked forward to; I shall forget such happiness as I have had—it has not been so very much, you know; I shall forget the money I owe. One goes to Russia and unless one makes money one is lost, one vanishes, in effect one dies—but I shall make money, *tu verras*"—for a moment she spoke almost cheerfully—; "I shall be a success; I shall become a real artiste: Russians always like me. And I shall get well again and I shall no longer be so

thin, and then I shall find out once more what it is to laugh."

"But why not stay in Paris, Illona? Your friends are in Paris."

"My friends—oh, *la barbe*! I have no friends. I don't want friends; I want love. And I have never found love in Paris."

"You found it once, dear: we both found it in Aix."

Two great tears collected in the corners of her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks before she answered: "Yes, I thought so, but I know now I was mistaken. It was a happy dream, but it lasted too long."

"Too long? I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. How should you understand anything about a woman, you an Englishman! You found me an amusement, Gerard, and a distraction: you were ill a little and lonely, but I, I loved you as I had never loved before, as I shall never love again. It lasted too long, because I could never afterwards go back to my life: you had made me used to something else, to tenderness. You were not like other men I knew. . . . Oh, Gerard, why didn't you let me alone? Oh, Gerard, Gerard!" She broke down now entirely, cried bitterly for a minute, raised her head a little, looked unseeingly at him, and then sank back, her eyes closed, her lips parted, her breast stirring not at all. For a moment he thought she might be dead, so still she seemed; he bent over and listened in vain for her breathing, and then softly kissed her lips. She moved; her hand seemed to feel for his; he drew back, holding her fingers tightly in his own.

Minutes passed ; she appeared to sleep. She drew his hand to her side and pressed it against her heart. Once she opened her eyes and looked at him as if she would speak, but she closed them again. And then she spoke, slowly, shyly ; the words seemed to come from her soul :

“Gerard, why did you want to see me again after you found me at the Trianon ? Was it curiosity or pity ? Why was it ? It was not love, for you do not love me, I know well. You went away and you forgot me. You never looked for me ; even you never wrote to me. And yet you must have known, you did know, that you left me there at Mâcon, miserable, desperate, broken-hearted.”

She began again to cry, convulsively, and she held his hand more tightly as if she feared that he would run away.

Gerard knew not what to do. Softly he caressed her forehead, drying her tears with his lips ; he felt himself torn from his moorings, and there came back to him all that she had been to him and the memory of how she had loved him. It was true that he had never forgotten her ; he would love her always ; perhaps he loved her now even more than in the past. He did not feel that he merited her reproaches. But it would be useless to try to explain. She would never understand. Very quietly he slipped his arm under her head. She made no resistance ; her strength was at an end.

“Illona, I do love you ; don’t you know it ? Cannot you see ? I wanted to find you again because I love you. I could not stop away from you any longer. I had to

find you and to put my arms round you and to hold you tight to my heart. And now, sweetheart, I have found you and everything must be as it was before—and as it shall always be. I will never let you go again, my darling, never. We will be so happy. You shall forget all the unhappiness I have caused you. You shall love me again as you used to do. You shall trust me with all your heart. Forgive me for not having written : I was a fool.”

As he spoke Illona grew calmer. He could feel that she was yielding more contentedly to his embrace, that she pressed herself to him ; but he could feel too her heart beating wildly, and that the arms which she had flung about his neck were trembling.

“Gerard, say that to me again. I can hardly believe it, but I do want so much to believe it, *tu sais*. Is it really true, *chéri* ? *Dis, tu m’aimes vraiment sincèrement ?*” She searched his eyes with her own.

“It is true, Illona : I swear it,” and, putting his arm behind her, he drew her to his breast and kissed her lips again and again, tenderly, passionately.

“Do not speak, Gerard. Oh, I am happy now,” and she hid her face in his shoulder.

Gerard Blundell did not return to the rue Cambon that afternoon. Illona, hardly moving, held him in her arms or at her side and the time slipped by. She seemed content to know that he was near her. At five she would have it that Jeanne must make him tea ; at six she sent him away. “I am still ill, dear, but I shall get well now quickly. Don’t ask me more questions to-day.

To-morrow, yes ; perhaps I shall be able to get up and come out with you. And, Gerard, come here, come close to me ; *je te dirai quelque-chose : chéri à moi*, I have been faithful to you ; I have thought of no one but you through all these long months ; and I have dreamt of you — but then I have waked up and you were not there ! But that's all finished now, *pas ? Tu es à moi maintenant, et je suis à toi seul*. Kiss me once more and then go. Yes, come at midday to-morrow and you will find me up and happy, I hope. *Oh, c'est bon d'aimer, tu sais.*"

CHAPTER VII

THE train that carried Gerard to St Cloud carried a man in whom happiness and content, fear and anxiety struggled for mastery. He had not planned what had occurred; he had not even thought of it as possible. One half of him pulled one way, the other resisted—but with no great power. For the moment he thought, or he believed himself to think, only of Illona's unhappiness, of her sad face lying amid her braided hair, of the great tears coursing down her cheeks, of her shoulders shaken by her sobs, of her new belief in him, of his own unworthiness. Could he live both lives? St Cloud came, and he walked slowly home. He could, he would, postpone till the morrow any decision as to what he should do. He still thought that the choice lay with him.

And on the morrow Illona was waiting him, but she was still in bed. She had tried to get up but her legs had given way beneath her, and she had fallen: "Feel here: there's a great bump on the side of my head. But that will pass. Everything that is unhappy will pass. I am going to be the happiest woman in Paris. I ought to be. I was only ill and I only became

thin because all the time I thought of you, *chéri*. Now you are mine once more, and the spring is here and I can be gay. The sun shines for me too."

The St Petersburg project was knocked on the head. Marinelli had found a good engagement for her, but the contract was not yet signed and anyhow "*je m'en fiche*," she said. She could go on dancing at the Trianon. Luckily she had not told Victor of her Russian plan: indeed it had been formed on the day of her seeing Gerard. She confessed as much shamefacedly. She had been sure that he didn't care for her but had suspected that he might wish to see her again—lightly, to pass the time; and the thought had frightened her into arranging to leave Paris. Contracts, plans, were not very binding in her world. Marinelli would find someone else.

Gradually Gerard was able to build up the story of what had happened since he had left Illona at Mâcon. She had returned to Aix and had danced—but not with her old success. Piaci had complained, not without reason, that all her gaiety, all her *légèreté*, had disappeared. No longer did she cajole lous from the pockets of her admirers, her would-be lovers, into his cash-box. She still danced well, yes, but dancing was not everything; indeed it was very little. His clients did not come and come again to see dancing; they wanted more than that. Still, she danced out the term of her contract and then returned to Paris and for a while did nothing, living on the little money she had saved, and on the proceeds of such presents as she could put *au clou*. All through those weeks she had never ceased to think of

her English lover, and to be sure that he would come to find her again. She kept for him her life; she kept her lips for him. After a while she was forced to dance. Naturally she drifted back to the Trianon where she had, two years before, made her debut and where Victor, the *patron*, liked her more than any other of his girls. Here the few sentences that Dedie had dropped about her friend supplied what was missing in Illona's own story. Every habitué of the Trianon knew Illona. She was an institution of Montmartre, of Paris even. Her *gentillesse* and her cheek, her something that no other girl had got, had made her the queen of her world; men would dispute and almost fight for her presence at their table. But in this autumn the vital spark had died down. No longer was she at the beck and call of anyone who could repay her with amusement or with gold. Her spirit was gone. For hours she would dance only with the dancer of the place; refusing the invitations of her old admirers, she would stand silent in the background. She had no ambition, no gaiety, no cheerfulness. She who used to make more money than any other two girls on Montmartre would return home with only forty or fifty francs. She forgot her habits, was false to her technique, ignored all those qualities that in the past had made her so great a success. Where she had made two or three hundred francs a night now she made hardly a couple of louis. And so, as Dedie said, she was truly *dans la purée*.

But now everything was to be changed. Illona had it all planned out in her mind. She was to go on dancing at the Trianon but Gerard was never to come to see

her there, or rather he was never to come until an hour at which she would be free and he would find her waiting for him. Life was to spin happy hours for them as it had spun them at Aix. She would dance; she loved to dance. He could trust her. She was his, his only. "*Comme je t'aime, mon Gerard, comme je t'aime!*" I shall forget everything that is sad; and oh, my sweetheart, I shall not annoy you"—the word "annoy" was the best translation that she could ever achieve for "*ennuie*"—"I shall not be in your way: you have your life and your work. I shall be content if you come to me when you can. *C'est bon d'aimer,*" she said again.

It was a strange, odd world into which Gerard, Englishman, public-school boy, wine merchant with the Oxford manner, dweller in a London suburb, now found himself introduced as a familiar. It was true: through all the winter Illona's heart had been breaking for love of him; and now that she had found him again she was loth to let him go. It had been a distressing hour when she discovered that he was living in France with his wife and his children, but for some odd reason the fact that they were out at St Cloud made their existence more tolerable: the few miles seemed to set them in another world.

Almost every day—certainly on every day when he had no business engagement—Illona would lunch with him—generally at some place not so far from his office: she tried always to remember that he had work to do. But often she would forget that he was a man of affairs

and would ask him to take her further afield—to the Bois, to Saint Germain. Almost always he would give way. Still, he did not neglect his duties. The hours that he took in the middle of the day for pleasure he made up in the evening. At St Cloud they became used to his being late for dinner, to his coming home in time to go to bed, or to his not coming home at all. He would plead work as his excuse. Mary took it for granted that he had a great deal to do. She would sit and sew in her own garden ; sometimes she would take the children to the Park. She was not unhappy. When he came home she greeted him affectionately.

Yes, it was a strange, odd world. In the middle of the day Illona belonged to him, not to Montmartre, not to Paris, but on the evenings, the nights, he gave to her—and they were many and grew more numerous—he seemed to share her with her world ; indeed he himself became part of her world. The doorkeeper at the Trianon came to greet him as an old friend ; Victor, the *patron*, used to welcome him with a smile ; the chauffeur who drove them to her work looked to him for orders ; at the Esqueline, the more homely and recondite *restaurant de nuit* to which at three or four o'clock in the morning experienced revellers took their way, he became almost a member of the family.

And she herself gradually recovered all that she had lost. She grew stronger under his eyes ; the colour came back to her cheeks ; no longer did she look thin and drawn and sad. A few days passed and she was a different woman. But still Gerard could see that everything was

not quite well with her: she was harassed by some memory or by some fear. More than once he asked her what it was, in what way he could help her; but she always answered that nothing troubled her now, that since she had him she had none but happy thoughts and happy hours, that she lived only for the time she spent with him and in expectation of his coming. Almost it was true.

During these days Gerard had ignobly to arrange his life. At St Cloud he let it be understood that the cares of the Paris office grew upon him, that it became more and more necessary for him to spend his evenings in Paris in the society of the people with whom he did business. As far as was possible he allowed Mary to jump to her own conclusions; he detested the necessity of lying. And she, poor simple soul, was so easily deceived. It never entered her head that her husband could even in small things be disloyal to her. The life he led, the hours he kept, took from his health, but that she easily attributed to his hard work and to the fatigue of his journeys to London, journeys which happened less often than she supposed. Her home and the care of her children occupied her mind and her time. Such hours as Gerard gave her she enjoyed keenly; she asked no more than that he should be contented and that life should proceed quietly, normally.

Illona went so late to bed that she seldom rose until after midday. Sometimes she would come down to meet her lover; sometimes he would fetch her. Going one day to the Square Moncey, Gerard discovered that what

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troubled her peace of mind was no more than money. The *encaisseur* from the Galeries Lafayette was waiting in her hall, portfolio in hand, truculence in his speech and his bearing. Jeanne evidently was doing her best to placate him. For the moment Gerard did not understand. He pushed past them and found Illona in her room, finishing her dressing and looking furiously at her own reflection in the mirror.

"What's the matter out there?" he asked. "What does he want, that fellow?"

For answer she dropped her powder puff and flung herself into his arms. "Oh, Gerard, I am so miserable; comfort me a little. *C'est pas ma faute*. It's the Galeries Lafayette: he wants to be paid. I'd promised to pay them to-day and I thought I would be able to. But I can't—oh, dear, I didn't want you to know." She began to cry, and her tears, Gerard could see, came from chagrin, shame.

"That is nothing, my darling: you were stupid not to tell me. How much does he want? I can give it you now, I'm sure"; and he drew out his letter-case and began to count the notes it contained.

"Look, there is the bill."

He took up the paper. It was an account for various useless and useful articles. In all it came to 490 frs. 90. To pay twenty pounds for things he had never even heard of was not amusing, but on the other hand he had as yet given Illona no money; she had asked for none; it was miserable to see her cry. And he had in his pocket more than the sum required. He had learned in Paris, just as he had learned at Aix, that

it was well always to carry money in this world of pleasure.

"Oh, Gerard, will you really pay all that for me? You are too kind to me. I do not deserve it. But I will explain. . . ." Her face cleared as if by magic.

Gerard moved to the door to put an end quickly to the altercation the echoes of which he could still hear, but Illona stopped him: "No, not that. Let me tell Jeanne. . . . Jeanne," she called, and then: "Jeanne, tell him you will take them the money before four o'clock this afternoon, *sans faute*." Then she turned to Gerard: "*Oh, là là! Ça va mieux*. But I didn't want him to see that you had given me the money; I wouldn't have liked that."

Later on at lunch Gerard learned the truth, or as much of it as Illona in her distress would tell him. Indeed what had happened and was happening to her was not entirely her own fault. His own quickness made him see that much of the responsibility was his. Before she had gone to Aix she had made money so easily; night after night she would return with two or three hundred francs. She made more than she could spend, more, often, than she troubled in her fatigue to count. Jeanne would tell her when she woke how much she had brought home. She had bought what she needed, had lent money to her friends, had been the well from which every unfortunate could draw; she had taken this expensive apartment and furnished it; she had taken almost as expensive a home for her mother; she had adopted a certain style of living and, coming by money so easily, had in very fact forgotten its value.

But all the time she had saved nothing. Each day did no more than pay for itself; sometimes indeed it left things unpaid for the morrow. Gerard had seen how she had come to Aix with nothing in her pocket. Where all her money went she had no idea. It was tolerably clear that she did not spend it on herself; she dressed plainly enough; her dancing dresses, her shoes, her stockings cost a good deal, of course, but they did not run away with all those thousands of francs. At one time she had had a banking account and as much as ten thousand francs had accumulated. She used to write cheques without calculation—until one day Jeanne had come back to say that the cashier would give her no more money, that her account was exhausted. Since then she had kept what she made in a drawer.

“*C’était bête!* I’m stupid. I’ll be sensible, *tu verras.*”

At Aix, because of Gerard’s presence and because of the restraints that her love for him put upon her, she had made hardly as much as she spent. And even when he had returned to England things did not improve. When she got back to Paris she had rested for as long as she could manage, and when she was forced again to her dancing she had no longer her old success. At first her admirers found her sadness an added attraction; it amused their perverse taste; but they came after a time to feel that it was allied with dullness. She had lost her spirit, her cheek, her power of attraction, her power of attracting men and money. As Dedie had said, if it had not been that Victor was fond of her she would have lost her place long ago. At the Trianon one had to be a success; Victor had no

room for girls who did not amuse and provoke his clients. And Illona had become a prude. There was no room for prudes at the Trianon either. Within limits—no one had ever discovered where those limits were!—the dancers had to supply their admirers with whatever they were willing to pay for. It was an ugly world but a very simple one. Victor was not a bad sort. His girls kept all they could make and he paid them something in addition. He was content if they attracted clients and if they called for champagne and peaches, peaches and champagne.

In short, Illona was in debt, and very much in debt. When she had come back from Aix and had begun once more to dance she had not realised, had not stopped to realise, how much less she was earning than in the spring and early summer. She had made no sort of alteration in the way in which she lived nor in the way in which she disposed of such money as she did earn. Still she sent her mother money, much more, as was her wont, than she had arranged to send; still her purse was at the disposal of her friends; still she kept up her little extravagances and her little generousities—for instance she told Gerard that she had never been on the Metro: "*Ça fait mal à la tête*; it isn't for people like me anyhow; *je préfère un taxi, moi*"; and she would take a taxi even if she was going into the next street, and generally she would give the chauffeur a franc for himself: "*Pauvre gosse*; he's got children at home, I dare say." And so, ever since the autumn her difficulties had tightened round her; she had been to money-

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lenders ; she was constantly dunned by the shops with which she dealt.

She told Gerard much of all this but only in general terms. He asked her the amount of her debts and what sort of sum would free her from her anxieties, but he received only evasive replies. The fact was, she was shy of telling him, and, just because of her love, she was reluctant to take money from him, hating to feel that he was paying her. And she was sanguine : every night she hoped to redress the balance. It was an accident surely that lately she had had so little success. She refused to see that money did not fall into her hands for the very simple reason that she no longer cajoled it out of her admirers' pockets in her old manner.

However it was clear that she had instant and insistent preoccupations, and Gerard, hearing her talk and realising the source of some of her hesitations, made her accept three thousand francs. He hoped, but was by no means sure, that she would now be able to deal with all that worried her most. She promised to attend at once to the payment of her more urgent bills, and he had no reason to suppose that she did not keep her promise. Beforehand the necessity of taking money from him had been for her a veritable nightmare, but directly it had happened she began to forget. Money had no importance for her. Three thousand five hundred francs was after all no great sum in her world. If she lacked it now and had to take it from him it was just because she had been careless, *trop dépensière* ; she would be more careful ; and in the meantime she loved Gerard more than ever and felt herself more than ever dependent on

him for her happiness. The idea that he might be inconvenienced by the result of her extravagances never crossed her mind. She took it for granted that he was rich; he had never seemed to lack money. Visitors to the Trianon had their pockets well lined, and that a man of his sort should really be so poor as to have to live with some care was entirely outside her experience of life.

Gerard, when he allowed himself to consider the matter at all, suspected all this, but he was in love and he was carried along on a stream in which the current was strong. Certainly now he was spending a great deal more than he made. One does not hang about Montmartre for hours night after night without getting rid of a lot of money; and Illona had many friends to whom to offer champagne a dozen times of an evening seemed the natural thing. Then at the Esqueline, after the Trianon was closed, she wished still to dance. Her appetite for dancing was never sated. He resented her dancing with other visitors, with the men who knew her and who seemed to wish always to make love to her, and she was forced to dance with the professional dancer of the place—and that meant a louis at the least. Still Gerard did not stop to think. Some day it would end no doubt, and in the meantime he was more than content.

And certainly Illona never imposed on him—never imposed on him herself, and refused, after a while, to allow him to be imposed on. That day marked a new stage in her affection for him. Her passion lived now side by side with tenderness, with a wish to protect him.

If he was sad, her face too became clouded ; if he seemed annoyed, she would try to provide some distraction for his thoughts. She wished in every way to delight and help him—and he had never the heart to tell her either that this amusement she suggested or that was too costly, or that he was tired and wanted to go to bed. She had the true spirit of the daughter of Montmartre : she hated the idea of going home until the day was well aired.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN one is in love intelligence suffers a temporary eclipse. To Gerard Blundell however was left just enough perception, just enough humour, to enable him to take pleasure in the study of the strange, the odd types with whom now he found it necessary to be familiar. Fortunately too he had that rare quality, rare especially among Oxford men, of being a "mixer." He was interested in people. The more diverse they were, the more they differed from the people of his experience, the more they interested him. At Aix, Champion and Mrs Goddard and her daughter in those three weeks had attracted him not at all because he had met their kind before ; and, besides, they were in an unfair competition : he had no time to think of any-one else than the girl who had bewitched him.

At first Illona's friends, her *copines*, had observed him curiously. He learnt from her, and indeed it became sufficiently obvious, that on Montmartre she had a reputation all her own. Not to put too fine a point upon it, she was not to be bought, and such virtue is rare in the neighbourhood of the Butte. Her friends and her rivals had never known her *de faire un miché* ; that she

had admirers, heaps of them, everyone knew, but she had never before given so much of her time to any one of them. Gerard's appearance was something very new and strange. But Illona was a favourite; even in the days of her greatest success she had been liked, and now, when she was thought to be on the down grade, she had disarmed jealousy. Her friends gave her lover a welcome; they made him free of their world. She was frank about him too: "*mon amant*," she called him. "*Mince alors!*" they answered; "but he's so English; he's like a stone. Oh, no; it's not possible!" All the same they treated him gently and drank his wine and were always willing to amuse him in the long hours during which he had to sit and wait. Nor were they more expensive to him than they thought reasonable. If they were hard up they would complain: "*Dis, ma petite Illona, j'ai pas de pognon*"; tell him to give me a louis." Louis became unimportant in Gerard's exchequer: he quickly ceased to keep any account.

It was in its heart a very simple and domestic society, that of which Illona was one of the queens. Perhaps she shared that ruling distinction with a girl a little older who also could call herself an artiste, for she sang in music halls and was the favourite of half Paris. Ferrat was very much a child of the quarter; her mother was a concierge; she had the carriage and the head of a princess; she had also a carriage with two horses; she had given herself a name after one of the headlands of France; she had diamonds and was sometimes without a penny; she it was of whom it was said that having discovered cocaine in the Latin Quarter

she had brought it to Montmartre and had debauched and ruined the whole venal world that bases itself on the Place Pigalle; immorality interested her as an art; she carried vice to every extreme of which she could read or hear or think; and withal she had the heart of a child, the appearance of a *jeune fille*, and she would have given the shift off her back to warm any poor beggar in the street. All Montmartre knew her and adored her.

A different type, a girl who had never any claim to being an artiste, was Fleurette Mayer. She made her money where she found it, was very pretty, attracted men by the turn of her little finger, chose her lovers for their wealth but treated them well, was rich beyond the dreams of Montmartre avarice, had her own car and her own chauffeur, was violent and vicious *comme tout* but had nevertheless so sweet an air, so virginal a face, that Gerard when he first saw her thought she must that very night have strayed into this world and that there might still be time to rescue her from it. "*Oh, que tu es innocent!*" Illona answered to his suggestion.

Yes, it was simple and domestic this society that held its court morning after morning at the Esqueline. As surely as three o'clock struck so surely one or all of these girls and their followers were to be found in that little stuffy room up those dirty stairs in the rue Notre Dame de Lorette. Gerard used also often to go there with Illona, to the ground floor, at eleven o'clock, after they had dined and she had dressed in her dancing costume. At that hour it was even more

domestic. There they would sit and Dedie would drink *un jus de viande*, and if any stranger did happen to come in he would look with astonishment at the sober Englishman and at the two girls with their silk stockings, their dancing shoes, and their spangled skirts peeping from under their cloaks. Illona had an abhorrence of cocaine, and it was at this hour that often she had cause to rally her friends on their idiocy: "*Dedie, tu es dégoûtante—déjà pleine de coco!* How are you going to dance like that? Victor will throw you out one of these days." And Dedie would go on drinking her stimulant and smile with that fatuous face that cocaine gives.

On such an evening Ferrat came in. It was Gerard's first introduction to her and he looked at her with curiosity, for Illona had spoken much of this friend of hers. She was dressed in a tailor-made gown of the severest and simplest cut but whose every line was a provocation. "She's not thin; she's a *fausse maigre*," he was told afterwards, and her face had the bloom of perfect health and something of the jeering grace of a young faun, and her eyes, deeply set, were green, the eyes of genius. And indeed she had genius.

"Ferrat, they're mocking me because of my cocaine," Dedie said.

"*Oh, ils sont piqués*: they don't know what is good. You'll finish by taking it, Illona; *tu verras!*"

And three sinister men and a rather battered woman who were playing cards with a greasy pack at the next table looked up and laughed. The argument, however, did not continue, for Illona and Dedie discovered that

it was time to go to the Trianon and they went off up the hill, all four of them, in Illona's taxi.

Ferrat had been singing at the Gaîté Rochechouart ; for once in a way she had not disappointed her public ; she was annoyed that Illona would not let her lover go into the Trianon ; she wanted to go herself. " 'Then I'll take him off' with me, eh, Illona ? I'll take him to Delmas' and he shall hear me sing. That'll amuse him, I'll warrant, and when I go round with the *quête* he shall start it with a louis. I'll give it back to him : it's only that other people shouldn't give silver. *Mon dieu !* they get meaner and meaner ! Oh, we'll enjoy ourselves, and I'll bring him to you at—three ? *Bien. A l'Esqueline, pas ?* "

Gerard felt like a shorn lamb as he jolted down the rue Pigalle in the company of this orchidaceous lady who seemed so willing to take him in her charge. He wasn't altogether pleased that Illona was so little jealous and he didn't at all understand what was expected of him. However, Ferrat soon put him at his ease.

" *Dis donc*, that Illona of yours is the best girl on Montmartre. Ah, she has a heart of gold. You are lucky, *tu sais*. And she's serious. Here we are. Stop, we won't go in yet : we'll go into Ermine's first."

So far Gerard had not seen very much of the night-world. His waiting on previous evenings he had done at the Esqueline or miserably dragging his feet up and down the floor of the Tabarin. Ermine's was an odd little place with a bar and a couple of small rooms in which dissipated Frenchmen sat about, and astonishing ladies. When Ferrat entered they sent up a chorus of welcome, calling on her to sing. She surprised him by paying not

the slightest attention, making her way to the best of the vacant tables.

"*Garçon, champagne—du sec, vous savez, et la carte, vite; dépêchez-vous!*" Then she turned to Gerard: "This pleases you, *mon chéri*? We have time. I'll sing for Delmas at one, when I've finished my supper. He can wait." Then she saw across the room a lady whom Gerard took to be the *patronne*, a woman of parts, corsetted and neat as a mistress of a school should be, and good-looking too in a matronly way: "Ermine, come over here; sit down: this is a friend of Illona's; he's a good fellow. But why isn't there any music? You don't know how to manage your *boite*. I start one myself next week. Finished then with you and Delmas. Chin, chin!" And forgetting all about Ermine and forgetting all about Gerard too, she fell on her supper, only stopping when music at last appeared and she jumped up, cried for a *danscur*, threw herself into a tango which she carried though with the long-limbed lithe grace of a panther and then ran out of the place, saying quickly to Gerard as she went: "Pay the bill and come after—across the road it is."

Gerard did pay the bill and felt rather proud of the notice his companion had attracted; and he had drunk enough champagne not to be shy when, pushing through Delmas' narrow door, he found himself in a room so crowded and so full of smoke that for a moment he could see nothing at all. And then he saw Ferrat: she was standing behind a piano; she had got rid of her hat; her short beautiful hair stood out round her head like a cloud; her face had all the humour and wit and

malign gaiety of Paris; she was singing a song of which he could make out but few of the words; her audience helped her with the chorus. Suddenly she saw him. "Hush—hush!" she said as if she were in church, holding up her hand to compel silence. "*Voilà, un nouveau!* A chair for Milord, a good place for him." For a minute she paused while two waiters hurriedly fitted up a table which they seemed to produce from under their napkins, and then she started her song again from the beginning, and Gerard had time to look around and see where adventure had brought him.

The Trianon was sometimes smart, but it was big and held all sorts; the Esqueline was not smart at all: it was Montmartre at ease; Ermine's was intimate and professional: one had the feeling that strangers were not admitted into its secrets; Delmas' was, at least on that night, so smart that Gerard wondered how so many people of the kind could be induced to crowd themselves into so cramped a room. As Ferrat went on singing he wondered no longer. Hers was the comic genius, but her voice had pathos and tragedy too in its deep tones—and then just at the moment when she wrung your heart she would break off and burst into laughter; and her audience, betrayed and delighted, would laugh with her, and she would swing from her platform, seize a napkin, twist it into the shape of a bag, and go round and collect money, making a face at a franc, smiling at a big coin, and giving value in some kind for every gold piece that fell into the *quête*, value in words, for she had a devil's wit.

This evening, as if remembering what she had said to Illona, she came first to Gerard. His duty done, she quickly held his louis up for all the world to see: "*Regardez! Milord did I say? He's a prince, this one. He shall be my lover; we'll go to Japan together, pour rendre visite au Mikado. N'est-ce pas, mon beau brun?*" and she ruffled his hair with her hand.

Gerard smiled and blushed and looked up and caught the eye of Monsieur Metivet, who had a lady with him, a lady of his own world, and who beckoned for Gerard to go across to him. The lady proved to be his sister, and they both teased Gerard about his success with the singer and asked him to come to the Café de Paris with them for supper. He refused, but refrained from telling them that he had arrived with Ferrat and that he must leave with her; when they rose to go he breathed a sigh of relief. He was still at the stage of feeling awkward at being discovered in the apparent pursuit of pleasure.

The worst of Delmas' was that Ferrat did not sing all the time. Delmas sang himself—oh, such sentimental songs, songs that he had himself written; and various young women sang who had not a tithe of Ferrat's success and not a hundredth part of her talent and who had the misfortune to believe that obscenity was a sufficient substitute for wit. And all the time one had to drink champagne and every few minutes one had to dip down into one's pocket to give to the singers, and fresh people would come in and crowd the place worse than ever, and the smoke would become thicker, and Delmas would become more atten-

tive to his clients. Then suddenly Ferrat, who had disappeared, appeared again dressed for the street. She had no hesitation about claiming Gerard :

“ *Allons, même : on monte à Montmartre.* It's time ” ; and before he really knew what he was doing he had paid his bill and seemed to be in a private carriage—it was Ferrat's own carriage as a matter of fact—and was driving up the *Chaussée d'Antin*.

“ It's too early for Illona : she won't be ready for you. We'll go and see the *Gitana* danced. *C'est nouveau à Paris.* ”

But Gerard had had enough. He followed her into *La Festa* with unseeing eyes. He was too tired even to see Spaniards. They might have been *Hottentots* for all the pleasure he took in their measures, and he poured his champagne into the ice bucket when his companion was not looking. There he had to sit however, fatigue or no fatigue. He was almost asleep when Ferrat jumped up :

“ *Payez vite ! On va chercher Illona.* ”

And the worst of it was that Illona would not let him go to bed either. “ Now I want to amuse myself,” she said. “ I've been working while you've been having a good time, *pas ?* ”

CHAPTER IX

IT was a good thing for Gerard Blundell that on the following day he had to go to England. For the sake of Illona, for the sake of his family, he arranged to travel by the train that, leaving at half an hour past midnight, landed him in London at just about the time that his partners settled down to their work. Gerard tried to be just, to hold the scales evenly. He went home on that afternoon earlier than was his wont, met Mary and the children in the Park, walked about in the sun, looked at the fountains, drank grenadine with Vivian, talked to Dickie about the importance of not forgetting his cricket, dined in his own garden, and returned alone to Paris in time to catch the evening train from the Gare St Lazare. Yes, he was in time to catch that train, but what he really did was to drive from the Etat station to the Square Moncey, to sit with Illona while she dressed, and then to go to the Esqueline until it was necessary for him to hurry to the Gare du Nord: she insisted on driving with him, and at the station entrance she clung to him as if they might never meet again.

The train that, after two days, brought him back to Paris arrived so late that Illona had already gone to her work. He had left London at half past four; Mary thought he was travelling by night: he could not go back to St Cloud. So, after drawing blank at the Esqueline, he had to invent for himself a way of spending the next three hours. Almost unconsciously he gravitated down the hill and to Delmas'. Ferrat greeted him as an old friend: practically no one had arrived yet, and she, some woman friend of hers, and Delmas himself were sitting in a corner drinking coffee, and Ferrat was amusing herself by blowing soap bubbles and laughing like a child, and with all a child's simple pleasure, at the results of her energy. When two o'clock came Gerard looked to her to take him once more under her wing, but to-night her mood was different and she said frankly that she wasn't free.

He had still an hour to kill, and he wandered back up the hill and dropped into the Pagoda, where his fame seemed already to have penetrated, for the *patron* greeted him by name and asked him why he had never before favoured his humble restaurant with his custom and begged that he might see him often again in the future: "And don't forget to bring Illona with you; we all like her."

Gerard realised then for the first time that the whole of Montmartre is a sounding-board, that everyone knows everybody else's business, that, granted the social differences that separate the interests of such places as the Trianon and the Abbaye from the less ambitious *boîtes* like the Royal and the Monico, it is quite

impossible to be at all a constant visitor to the Butte without becoming a character of whom every obvious fact is immediately known. And he began to learn then that Victor at the Trianon was only one of a family, the second of five brothers, all of whom were equally concerned in the same nefarious business and each of whom, with one exception, ran a restaurant of his own, casting between them a net which covered Paris from the dance-hall at the Empire on the Boulevard to the Trianon on the Place Gerando. They were Jews, Algerians: Victor had been the first to come to Paris; he was a waiter and knew how to please his clients; he knew also the commercial value of pretty women, and he collected them, rescued the Trianon from desuetude, and became a Paris character. Then he sent for his brothers. Balzac should have written about that family. Victor himself had something of the air of a man of the world, became so rich that he even owned race-horses, and ultimately married the daughter of a Jewish banker; Edouard, his elder brother, ran the Esqueline, had a wife and several beautiful children, looked as if he might be a prosperous *rentier* in a provincial town, and, as he stood at the head of his dirty stairs and welcomed the girls who made his place their home, seemed indeed the incarnation of domestic respectability; Gustave had the Empire after the theatrical performance was over, and was the only one of the five who had not the secret of atmosphere; Jean, the youngest, a large and oily person who imitated his brother's graces without having his brother's technique, did his best with the Pagoda and

indeed at times made it more fashionable than the Trianon, for Victor paid the penalty of success and his place was often crowded with *moche* nobodies; Henri, the fifth, drifted about and was used by his brothers: he did their odd work: he had the least attractive character of the five. They made a strange group. A girl who was loved by one was loved by all. Their comparative charms and prowess in such adventures were discussed on Montmartre. When they were not despoiling their clients they were generally to be found playing cards. Their success lay in their unity. When the Trianon closed you were told to go down to the Esqueline, and if you had grown tired of both places then you were in effect forced to go to the Pagoda or the Empire. Girls who had outlived their period of usefulness at the Trianon were passed on to the Pagoda, and, in any case, while they had admirers who could pay for champagne, were induced to finish up their nights at the Esqueline. The Brothers Assisi were in short a very ingenious and successful combination. And for three years Illona had been Victor's favourite; and she was none the less his favourite for having refused his favours. She had become, so to speak, the child of all the brothers.

Walking across from the Pagoda to the Esqueline, Gerard met Ferrat on the doorstep. They went in together and found themselves at once on the edge of some excitement.

"*Q'est-ce que c'est?*" Ferrat asked.

"Just a battle," a waiter answered; "only Fleurette: she's fighting with Magda."

Gerard, who knew neither name, wanted to stop where he was, but Ferrat seized his arm and hurried him up the stairs, shoved and pushed her way through the door and reached the centre of the crowd, a crowd of women and men who were watching with some amusement and excitement and with no particular anxiety a sight that made him sick. On the floor a girl lay kicking and struggling, her clothes almost off her back: she was a big girl, but two other girls were holding her down and another held her feet. "Yes, that's Fleurette, all right," Ferrat said, as if she saw nothing unusual—"the one with the shoe. It's too much, this!" And she ran forward and tried by gentle words to restrain her friend, who looked angrily at her and returned to the pleasant task of bringing down the heel of the shoe she carried on her victim's head, till it seemed to Gerard that it could be nothing but a mass of blood and hair.

Everything passed in a second. Gerard felt like a stone; he had never seen women fight before; it was impossible for him to move; and then suddenly someone pushed him on one side and, almost before he realised that it was Illona, he saw that she had her arms round Fleurette, her strong arms, and was crying to Ferrat to help with the others. Perhaps Fleurette's rage was sated; suddenly she sank down and began to cry. "*Va t'en*, Magda," Illona cried to the girl who had been the victim; "for God's sake clear out and don't come back to-day"; and the girl, struggling to her feet with difficulty, and with her face streaming with blood and tears, surrendered herself to the *dame du lavabo*, who, like the second in

the prize-ring, washed and smoothed her. But Magda would not go away. "*Je reste ici* ; I'm not afraid of her," she kept proclaiming, and after a minute she found a seat in a corner, ordered champagne, and surrounded herself with all the poorer girls in the place. In the meantime Fleurette Mayer had also picked herself up, and Illona and Ferrat had carried her to a table, where she sat between them and explained her grievances. Gerard, who felt the effect of all this excitement more even than the chief actors, gathered that Magda had been the aggressor: she had actually looked at Fleurette's lover, had surely tried to take him away in effect, that afternoon at the races. Ferrat, after hearing the full recital, turned a droll face to him and winked. He felt restored.

That was Gerard's first actual introduction to Fleurette Mayer. She and Ferrat were Illona's best friends, and Illona and Ferrat refused to let Fleurette leave their side even for a moment during what remained of the night. They gave her supper and champagne—for which Gerard had to pay—and ultimately the three of them took her home to the Avenue de Messine in her own magnificent automobile, the driver of which, although he had heard that his mistress had been murdering someone upstairs, showed not the slightest sign that anything untoward had occurred.

Gerard liked Ferrat; he had been told no harm of her: Illona was slow to give away her friends. He was sure he did not like Fleurette.

CHAPTER X

THAT spring and summer were the heyday of the tango. In England the papers had been full of it; in Paris it occupied everybody's attention. It had even been seen, in a very maimed and mitigated form, at dances in Wimbledon. Mary, who had given up dancing after Vivian was born, had been interested in seeing the amateur efforts of her young friends, and one evening she asked Gerard whether, now that she was in Paris, she could see the tango really well danced by professionals. "I'd like Vivian and Dickie to see it too, if it really is proper as they say. Isn't there some place where they have a *thé dansant* which it would be quite nice for us to go to? It would do them both good to see really fine dancing. I want them to dance well, and they might get more interested in their lessons if they see how pretty it can be."

Gerard caught his breath a little at his wife's idea. It was trenching on dangerous ground, but after all he could advance no reason why it should not be carried into effect. It would be all right if he did not have to accompany them, and he made that unlikely by explaining that at tea time he was generally at his busiest—the

night mails had to be caught : " You can go very well by yourselves ; Dickie will be as proud as Punch to be the man of the party—or you might wait till the Warwicks come. It's the sort of thing they are sure to want to see. In the meantime I'll find out the best place."

In normal circumstances or in London nothing would have pleased him better than such an excursion with his family. He delighted in giving his wife pleasure, and even more did he delight in seeing his children's fresh young interest in any new experience. But he knew so many of the professional dancers, and a number of them worked in the afternoon as well as at night, not so much for the sake of the money they could make as for the sheer love of dancing and for the possibility of adventure. From four to seven they taught and danced at the innumerable *thés tango* which had sprung up all over fashionable Paris. He would almost surely be recognised, and he felt that he would be shy at being seen in the character of a family man. Besides it would be mixing cabbages and baskets. No, Mary and the children should go by themselves or they should go with the Warwicks.

And they went with the Warwicks, who turned up several days earlier than they were expected, and who, knowing Paris very little, were anxious to do anything and everything that was in the movement and which was not of the kind they had already tired of in India. Indirect inquiry had taught Gerard that the place for them to go to was the Philadelphia Palace, a semi-American hotel near the Etoile. Every Friday there

was tea and an exhibition of dancing arranged by a swarthy, handsome and graceful gentleman of Latin extraction, under whose auspices one could for five francs not only gain admittance but drink tea or chocolate and eat cakes and watch, as his card had it, "Tango, Maxixe Brésilienne, Boston, etc.," danced by himself and his *danseuse* and also, with more error and energy, by his fashionable pupils. Indeed the Friday teas at the Philadelphia Palace were both fashionable and select. They were hardly advertised.

The fact that their afternoon's amusement was to cost each of them five francs gave Mary pause; but they were already on the doorstep. "Hang it, Mary, we can't disappoint the kids now. And if we don't go here, where the deuce are we to go?" her brother-in-law asked. After all, she remembered, they were carrying out Gerard's instructions.

On that particular morning, long before her usual hour for waking, an urgent call came for Illona to go to the telephone. Not that she had a telephone herself, but a neighbour had one and her friends knew that on special occasions they could summon her. It was Jeanne who disturbed her.

"Madame, Monsieur Berger wants you on the telephone; he says he must speak to you."

Illona turned over in bed, pushed her bedclothes away, rubbed her eyes and sat up: "What's that? Oh, *la barbe!* What check to wake me! Ask him what he wants."

A minute passed, and then: "He wants to know

whether you'll be very kind and dance for him this afternoon at the Philadelphia Palace. His *danseuse* has hurt her ankle and he doesn't know what he'll do if you won't help him."

"No, I won't; I'm not free; I've an engagement. Stop, Jeanne: tell him politely that I wish I could, but that as it's impossible, he'd better ask Sybil. He'll know who I mean. By the way, ask him who his *danseuse* is. Perhaps I'd manage it if she was a friend of mine rather than let her get into trouble. But hurry."

Monsieur Berger was not so easily denied. "Madame, he says that Sybil's no good, that she's not *chic* enough, that she's too *gamine*. Miarka Gerbhoff—or some such name—it is who's hurt herself."

"Oh, very well; tell him he must fetch me at three or as soon after as suits him. I must do it for Miarka's sake, *pauvre enfant*. And now quick, my coffee and *Le Journal*."

And so it happened that while he was lunching at Voisin's with a champagne magnate Gerard, too, was called to the telephone and was told by Illona that after all she could not meet him that afternoon, that she had some work to do for a friend, and that she would tell him all about it that night when he came to fetch her at the Trianon.

A large hall set round with little tables; silent waiters; sideboards covered with cakes; in the centre a clear space for dancing. Most of the tables were occupied by English and American dowagers and their daughters. There were a few young men, French and

Spanish, too neat, too well groomed, and with boots of absurd length. Monsieur Berger, whose appearance did his profession credit, had not yet begun his exhibition; he stood in the background talking to his *danseuse*. He had already had to explain a dozen times why a change had been rendered necessary. The dowagers had expressed their sympathy.

It was not the kind of function that Illona liked. She did not approve of being patronised; she did not find herself in sympathy with old and fat ladies, or with their daughters either for the matter of that. However, friendship was friendship and she was prepared to do her best. She did like the look of one little party of people, very obviously strangers to Paris, who had arrived too early and were now showing their anxiety that the show should begin; or rather she liked the look of the three children. She loved children, and she had asked that her own table should be next to theirs so that while she was waiting between the dances she could look at them and hear them talk. They were not very smart, this group, and they had not been given a good place.

The dowagers had to their astonishment to confess that the new *danseuse* was an improvement on her predecessor. "I hope he'll keep her, Mamma," the young girls said; but luckily Illona did not hear or, much as she loved praise and appreciation, she would have danced ill on purpose rather than do her friend harm through comparison. She knew that she herself was the better dancer, but she was not to-day trying to dance particularly well. Berger, though, was

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a dancer in a thousand and it was difficult not to enjoy dancing with him. . . .

Major Warwick had insisted that the three children—after all they had had to bring Basil—should sit in the front. As she circled the room Illona could see Dickie's wide eyes and open mouth. He looked, she thought, as if he would like to eat her. He reminded her of somebody, of something. Once when her steps took her near him she caught his glance and smiled kindly; he blushed and looked away. She thought him an adorable little boy, and Mary who had seen her smile wondered how so nice a girl could be doing such unimportant work.

The dance over, Illona went to her table and sat fanning herself and sipping iced coffee. It was very hot. Dickie was just behind her, and in the glass she could see that he kept turning to look at her and she heard his whispered sentence: "Uncle David, that pretty lady will dance again, won't she? She's much prettier than anything I saw in the pantomime, much. I'd like to watch her for hours and hours."

Major Warwick was not greatly a man of the world. His small nephew's so openly expressed admiration made him nervous, shy. "Have another cake, my boy?" he asked. "No? Why, you're not half a man. I used to eat twice that number when I was your age. Tell me some other things about your school——" Illona heard no more; she had to dance again.

When she came back Dickie was still talking about his school, but it was in relation to his cricket, a game that he loved so much that he failed to notice the return

of the pretty lady to whom just now in his inmost soul he had been vowing a lifelong devotion :

“ . . . No, the first six balls I didn't get anything, and then I got one for a leg ball ; and then for another four balls I didn't get any, and then I hit a two with a leg ball ; then for another three balls I didn't get anything, and then I got out on a straight ball that wasn't pitched up so much. Wasn't it bad luck ? ”

“ It was indeed, my boy. I only hope I'll stop in England long enough to see you play. Mary, when did you say Gerard thought his work over here would be finished ? I shouldn't think you'd anyhow want to stop on at St Cloud into the autumn. It must get damp.”

. . . Illona looked again at the boy and caught her breath. So this was Dickie of whom his father loved to talk, and that girl was Vivian, and the baby was Basil ! Of course. She might have known it. How like they were to him ! But Dickie was the most like. He had his father's eyes, and his father's way of holding his head. And that woman was their mother ; she was the mother of Gerard's children, that cold Englishwoman who could never have loved him as she loved him. . . .

Yes, that boy was Gerard's. And she had longed and had hoped and had prayed to have a son of his, a boy who should be like that, clean and straight and strong, with happy eyes and smiling face, a boy of her very own, who, whatever happened, would recall his father, and who would be for ever a link with those days that had passed at Aix and Le Lavandou and those days in Paris that were passing so quickly. Illona had in her heart of hearts no illusions. Her life, her training,

had almost killed the power of self-deception. She had come to know Gerard, to understand him, but she loved him nevertheless. . . .

And that boy was Dickie and she could not speak to him! Oh, how she longed to put her arms round him, to take him to her heart, to talk to him of his pleasures, to talk to him of his father! All that she could do was to look at his back in the glass, to see where the short light hair grew in tiny curls to his neck, to see his little pink ears, and the fine lines of his shoulders under his black coat and the funny white collar that made him look such a man. What would she not give to call the child her own, or such a child? But she had ceased to hope. It was her fault surely. And soon, to-morrow, in a month, in a year, her new happiness would pass from her life.

Gerard should never know that she had seen his children.

That night Gerard dined at home. His wife, her sister, and his brother-in-law thought very highly of the tango. "My dear, what there is to be shocked at I can't see. They danced so well." The two women gave the man the palm, but Major Warwick was sure that the girl was the better of the two. "You should have seen Dickie: he couldn't keep his eyes off her. You'll have trouble with him, Mary, mark my words," he added.

"What were they called?" Gerard asked more from politeness than for anything else. They could not tell him. They did not know. And they sat on in the garden and talked about dancing and the two boys' future and

what the Warwicks were to do in Paris, until it was time to go to bed. "Gerard has so many late nights in Paris; he doesn't like to have them here too," Mary explained.

"Late nights in Paris! H'm! I think if I were you I should look into the matter," her brother-in-law said, with a good-humoured laugh. Gerard did not laugh, but he smiled pleasantly and said nothing. He had been vexed at Illona's failure to spend the late afternoon with him. He was not used to such independence on her part, and, being vexed, he had on getting back from lunch sent her a *petit bleu* to say that he would not be able to see her until the next day, that he must spend the night at home.

CHAPTER XI

THERE was a letter from Illona waiting for Gerard at his office in the morning. It was short and it was affectionate enough, but it had an unusual air and it asked him after all not to come and fetch her for lunch and not to see her that night. "I'm not doing any harm, *mon chéri*. You may have confidence in me. I shall go straight home after I've danced and I want to be alone. I love you more than ever and I'll write and ask you to come to-morrow or next day."

Gerard did not like the tone of the letter; he had begun the day with an impatient thought about her and now he shrugged his shoulders. . . . But that mood did not last very long. As the morning drew on he began to fret; he lunched alone and unhappily; he spent a depressed afternoon, and going home early he pleaded a sick headache and went to bed. He had not written to Illona, and no sooner did his head touch the pillow than he was ashamed of his own carelessness, his own impatience. But it was too late to write now.

Her work at the Philadelphia Palace finished, Illona had been taken home by Monsieur Berger, and had listened to his offer to engage her permanently as his *danseuse*, and had refused it. Indeed her mind was set on other matters than dancing and she dismissed him curtly at her door. She went at once to her room, told Jeanne that in no case was she to be disturbed until it was time for her to dress—no, not even if her lover came to see her—locked herself in, flung herself on the bed, hid her face in her pillow and cried and cried, softly at first and then with less restraint, so that her maid, hearing, wondered what had happened and guessed that her mistress had discovered that “*l’anglais*” was unfaithful. “*Oh, tous les hommes sont les mêmes ; que les femmes sont bêtes de leur donner leurs cœurs !*” she said—and she had had experience.

But Illona—no experience would lessen for her the heart-sorrow that she felt. She was like a mother who has lost her child. She had seen that day all the happiness that could never be hers. She bit at the sheets and the tears rolled through her fingers. For a while she was as one distraught; and then she slept.

That night at the Trianon she reminded her friends of the Illona of a year ago. She danced with her old spirit; she laughed and drank champagne with all the world; she raised wild hopes in a dozen breasts. Victor was delighted with her; but Dedie knew better than to believe that all was well with her *copine*. She smelt trouble, and, like Jeanne, attributed it to some stupidity of her friend’s lover. Once or twice she wished

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to restrain her in her wilder moments, but Illona shook her off: "*Laisse-moi tranquille ; fiche-moi la paix !* I want to amuse myself, to have a good time to-night. Why not ?" But all the same, when the Trianon closed she went home. Dedie drove with her and was glad that her friend was safe in bed, for she too liked Gerard and did not want anything to happen.

Illona did not sleep. She tossed from side to side. Something had broken in her heart, she thought.

In one day more Illona had come to the end of her endurance. She bade Gerard meet her at the Restaurant Ledoyen, and sat there with him under the trees and laughed and denied absolutely that anything had been the matter with her. "No, I just wanted to be alone ; *c'est tout* ; it's natural. You're not jealous, are you ? I told you once before that you don't know how to be jealous. But you needn't be, *chéri à moi*, you needn't be ; I've done no harm, *je te jure*. And here we are together again. Don't I laugh enough ?" She had chosen Ledoyen because it had no corners, because they could be seen by everyone. She could not allow herself to cry.

"Dis, Gerard: doesn't your boy, the oldest one, doesn't he miss his English games ? But he's only a baby. He can't play cricket, can he ? He's so young. What does he do ?"

Gerard explained that Dickie was not too young to play cricket, and that he regretted the game all day long, regretted it even when he was drinking grenadine in the park at St Cloud ; and he explained how

very little boys are taught games in England, that in many ways their cricket and football are the two most important items in their preparatory school education, and so on ; and then he had to explain what a preparatory school was. "He'll be going to a real school by and by, of course."

"What school? All that interests me, Gerard. Eton or Harrow?" Illona had heard a great deal about Eton and Harrow from the Englishmen she had known, young men at the Embassy, officers in the Guards: Chisholm had been at Eton and had continually assured her that Harrow was inferior.

Gerard laughed: "You are rather odd, *mon enfant*. No, he won't go either to Eton or to Harrow. There are other schools, you know! I did put him down for a house at Harrow—but I've changed my mind. He's going to Charterhouse."

"But why? I thought that a gentleman's son had to go to Eton or Harrow. I'm sure it's true. No, don't laugh, Gerard; I'm not a fool. I've often talked about schools in England; they are not so very good, any of them, I think, but those are far the best, now aren't they?"

"Yes, they're supposed to be the best, but they are not so much the best that one need worry if one's son goes to Charterhouse or to one of a score of others. There's Winchester for instance." He smiled.

"But if they're best why don't you send him to one or other of them?"

"Oh, for all sorts of reasons. If you want to know the truth it's because I've got to think of two boys, and

I can't afford to send them both to Harrow. It would make a good deal of difference."

"How much difference?"

"Two or three thousand francs a year each, I dare say. But I don't care. In many ways Charterhouse will suit Dickie much better than Harrow."

Ilona was not convinced.

CHAPTER XII

THEIR meal finished they drove together as far as the corner of the Boulevard de la Madeleine and the rue Cambon, and there Gerard alighted. He was well satisfied. It was true that Illona had not been very gay, had been, indeed, unusually preoccupied, but now certainly his little resentment was dead. He was to see her again that evening.

Illona's taxi pursued its way eastward; there was much traffic and it went slowly. Suddenly she heard her name called. A long, low, grey racing car, wicked in its lines, had come up beside them; its owner was driving it himself and he had so manœuvred as to be able to talk to the girl as they proceeded. "Well, Illona, what are you doing? I bet you've been lunching with that Englishman of yours. He's too old, my dear, and rather a dull dog. Why won't you ever lunch with me nowadays? You haven't given me an hour since we went to Versailles. It isn't very nice of you."

The Duc de Villancra certainly had many of the qualities that Gerard lacked. He was youthful and slim and he had that unusual air of extreme smartness that

the London tailor achieves always for the young Italian. His hair was brushed back, in his buttonhole was a carnation of exactly the right shade of colour to go with his brown suit; he drove as if his car was a living thing, with seeming carelessness but with admirable skill; he was, in fact, the embodiment of Latin elegance. Illona and he had been great friends. She had liked him for a dozen reasons: he was rich and heedless, a perfect dancer, gay and always amusing, and above all, his car had been at her disposal whenever he was in Paris. She looked at him now rather moodily.

"What you think of my Englishman, as you call him, doesn't interest me, Paul. Why haven't I lunched with you? I don't know. . . . 'That's not your old car.'"

"It's not; I only got it last week. Isn't it a beauty? Get out of that thing of yours and come for a spin. I've nothing to do. We might go out to St Cloud for tea. Come along. You owe me some kindness—and I'll never tell him; oh, and I'll be very good too!"

"No thanks; I'm not going to drive with you. But I tell you what! You say you've nothing to do. You get out and lend me the car for a couple of hours or so. The chauffeur can drive till we get outside Paris and then I'll drive myself, eh?"

Paul Villanera made a wry face. "Oh, you can drive, if you like; I always say you drive as well as you dance, or would if you had enough practice. But what do you want to go alone for? What's the matter with me?"

"Nothing, my dear. I'm very fond of you, *tu sais bien*, but I just don't want your company to-day; I want to be alone; and I want to go fast, as fast as I can. I

want to think, and you don't assist thought, Paul. Here, pull up! You shall drive me home first as a treat. I can't go as I am."

Illona, when they reached her door, refused to let Paul Villanera get out of the car. "No, wait for me. . . . I know that, my dear, but *je ne veux pas!* You are too enterprising. I shall be down again in two seconds."

"I haven't been long, have I?" she asked, having extended her two seconds into twenty minutes. "Well, I'm sorry, *na!* Give the chauffeur the wheel and come and sit here, and I'll let him drive you home first."

"But I don't want to go home. I don't know where I do want to go. Oh, very well; I'll go home. I do look tired, I suppose."

When, having dropped the car's owner, they were at last outside the gates and in the Bois, Illona and the chauffeur changed places. It was true: she did know how to drive, and it was so long since she had driven that at any other time she would have taken delight in her charge. But to-day, save for a certain satisfaction in extending the machine to the limit of safety, she thought very little of the car. Her brain was working too hard. Try as she would to press down the thoughts and doubts and questions that arose she failed dismally. Speed and the necessity of prudence, the singleness of purpose that driving demanded, helped her a little; but all the time care sat by her side, and anxiety, indefinable but insistent.

Ever since she had seen Gerard's children her mood had altered. Her love for him had not lessened, but it

had suffered a change. The passionate jealousy that they were another woman's and not hers had almost left her. Long ago she had ceased actively to resent the absence from her life of just those things which alone would have promised her happiness for the years that were to come. Long ago she had become reconciled to the knowledge that nothing of good in her life, neither love nor joy nor comfort nor success, could be other than fleeting companions. Never until she had seen Gerard had she known what love really was; never had she known content and happiness. Now she saw that both were to be taken from her even more quickly than she had feared. All the doubts that vaguely filled her head after the dance at the Philadelphia Palace had come back to her with quadrupled force since her conversation with Gerard of an hour ago. Before that she had thought, when she had seen his children, of how much he must mean to them, how necessary he must be, and, vaguely, of the way in which she was taking him from them. About what she was doing to his wife she troubled not at all. A woman was a fool who could not keep her man. She had looked for one second at Mary Blundell, had seen the manner of woman she was, and pitied and resented her—that was enough. She had borne Gerard's children, and Illona hated her and tried to forget her existence. But the children: they were so dear, so like Gerard, especially the boys; her heart yearned for them. Always she had longed for children of her own, and these seemed to her a little her own—and yet she could not claim them; it was likely she would never see them again.

Dickie it was who most had won her heart. He, she thought, was quite absurdly like his father; he had nothing from his mother; so even he might have looked if in fact he had been her child, her own and Gerard's; so she would have wished him to look. And it was Dickie now who gave her the miserable fears that she could not repress.

Illona had thought Gerard Blundell sufficiently rich. She had taken it for granted that, like so many other men she had met, men who had courted her and whom she had rejected, but whose affairs she knew, he was rich enough for all ordinary purposes. Poor men, or men who had to think before they spent a thousand francs, had not come very much into her world; she had not encouraged them. She liked her admirers to have well-lined pockets, or to seem to have them; she liked to see them spend money, to make them spend it indeed. It was a sign of her power: it amused her. And if she had not made Gerard spend it was not because she thought that he was not rich, but because he was not like the others, because she loved him and wished now to protect him a little: he was her own, and she did not play with him.

Now suddenly she had discovered that he was far from being wealthy, that he had indeed not enough money to keep him from care, to provide him with what she had always supposed were for a man of his class the essentials of his life. His sons were to go to a school less expensive than Harrow or Eton because he could not afford the extra cost. Six or seven thousand francs! Already she had spent from his pocket more

than that sum in the last two months. And what had she to show for it? Nothing almost. No longer did her creditors render her life so miserable, but that was all, and it accounted for no more than a half of what he had given her. In some things Illona was methodical. She had recently started to keep an account of what she made in her work and of what Gerard gave her; and, more roughly, of the way in which she spent it. How many hundreds of francs she had thrown away, lending or giving them to the girls at the Esqueline, squandering them on flowers to give a moment's pleasure to the woman who was selling them, or on sweets! Now other debts would be falling due almost at once, and in a few days there would be her rent again and her mother's. Gerard would have to give her more, much more, and always he would have to give her money while she remained as devoted to him as she was now. For in these days it was as it had been through the winter, although with a difference. Now she made hardly a third of what had been her income a year ago, before she went to Aix. With Gerard's return her gaiety had come back and her health, but her easiness had not returned with them. So many men disgusted her, so many things—men and things that a year ago she took as all in the night's work. Nor could she bring herself nowadays to ask for money. A man would dance with her or call her to his table. If he gave her a louis or two or five, good; if not, *tant pis*!

Indeed her character was altering. Gerard unwittingly had taught her much, and, loving and respecting her, had taught her also to respect herself

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more than she had ever done before. What she had come to look upon as the ordinary technique of her life was now repugnant to her. Sometimes even it had been on the tip of her tongue to ask him to let her cease working, but then she would remember that it would mean that she would almost have to relinquish dancing too. She loved dancing so much. In the old days the dancing gave her pleasure, but so did it give her pleasure to make fools of men, to make them pay for their stupidities and their caprices. Among her comrades her ability to get money, much money, out of the meanest men had become a byword. If Dedie, or Angèle, or Carmen failed, sometimes they would appeal to her for assistance. She looked upon such episodes as games of skill. She matched her brains and her wit against the men who came and it was a sad day when she did not emerge victorious. She had become a connoisseur of men, a rare judge of their capacities for meanness and generosity. There was no end to her cunning; her devices were never exhausted. Sometimes, if everything else had failed, she would produce a louis and suggest playing heads or tails. "*Face*" the victim would say; it was *pile* and Illona was a louis the richer, or it was *face* and she pushed a louis across the table with a pout. Naturally it would be refused, and they would play again: it was inevitable that she should win! For every type a different method. Englishmen were the least difficult as in effect they were the most generous. "It's the fête of St Joachim to-day; give me a louis or you'll have no luck till the year's over." That was the

simplest of her contrivances. Or the unwary German would call her to his table. Nothing loth she would sit down and amuse him for ten minutes, and then, if he showed no signs of generosity, she would fix her eyes on his shirt studs or his cuff-links: "*Comme ils sont jolis!*" she would say; "I should like those; they are just what I want for my new corsage." And generally she would get them—especially if the man had companions before whom he did not wish to appear mean. Such considerations she knew how to turn to account. The whole thing became a game that she played far more for the sake of playing it than for the actual money it brought her. The louis once in her hand she as often as not lost it or gave it to her less clever sisters; the links or the studs she would keep for a few days—and then forget or give them to some musician who had done her a good turn. Men appeared to her to be fools and worse. It was a delight to her to feel she was getting a little even with them. Fiercely she resented, had always resented, that she was a plaything for any man who cared to spend a few louis on his evening's amusement. She saw her life as it was, without illusion. When it was possible to make men pay heavily she smiled with satisfaction; she would make them spend money just for the fun of it. Always, for instance, she would finish her supper with a demand for cigarettes. Her host would offer his case. She would look at its contents suspiciously: "No, no, *je veux les Royal Derby, moi,*" naming the cigarettes which were the most costly in the house. And in a minute or two, when she had left the table, her host would see that she had given the ten-

franc box to the negro singer or the Spanish male dancer. It was no use with Illona to plead that you had no money: she would point out that a cheque would do. . . . And at the back of everything she did was a passionate dislike of men, and an eager desire to punish them. There were exceptions of course; she had her friends, her favourites, young men who danced well, old men who, like Metivet, had kind hearts and amusing faces and who would treat her like a daughter. Perhaps she disliked women even more, the women who came with their husbands and who looked at her and spoke to one another about her and smiled patronisingly and sometimes offered her five francs. When the husband of such a one came back alone on the next night—as he so often did—she took good care that he went home with empty pockets.

But now all this cunning was half abandoned, and if half-heartedly exercised was far less effective than it had been. For nearly a year Illona had carried the memory of Gerard in her heart, and, while the thought of him and of his neglect of her through autumn and winter had fed her resentment, yet she had never found it possible to drift back into her old easy habits, and even her dancing meant less to her. When she danced she gave herself to her partner and since Aix she had nothing to give: all was for Gerard. She had no thought for anyone else. Her little excursions with Villanera and his like were experiments, and they were not successful. . . .

As she drove Illona thought of all these things and of the past and of the future. The past was her

own ; no one could take it away from her, not Gerard himself, nor his wife. The future—it was of the future that she thought most. If what he had told her was true—and she knew that it was—then surely she was hurting Gerard's life, hurting his children whom she loved, standing between them and their happiness and the full lives he had planned for them. What should she, what could she, do ? Her duty was clear ; it had seized her by the throat ; it was because of its clearness that now she was driving like a fool in the quiet ways of the Bois, risking her life—and her friend's car, she smiled to remember. If only she could escape from her duty, escape from the knowledge of it, evade it even. But she was no fool. She had to give Gerard up. She knew it.

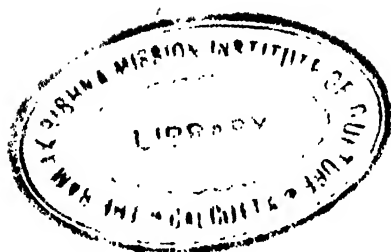
How could she, though ? She had to give him up because she loved him, and she could not give him up because she loved him. If she left him now, fled from him, he would never know the reason : he would think always that she was unworthy of him, that she had found another lover, that she had tired of him, of his caresses, his words, his tender thought. That she could not face. He must never believe her unfaithful to him ; he must never suspect that, after all, the months of happiness they had had together were false. She had determined already that she would in some way put an end to everything that was between them—of that she was sure—but she must protect the past ; she must contrive a separation that would leave his early memories of her unspoiled. He loved her, she knew ; he should cease to love her, but he should still love

the Illona of Aix, of Talloires, of Le Lavandou. She must cure him of his present love ; gradually she must wear it down ; she would so manage that he would leave her because she was altering, had altered from the girl he had made his own. He should go away content, satisfied, without regret, and yet without thinking badly of her, without really losing his faith.

Suddenly she turned the car, too suddenly : almost she wrecked it. Then she tore back through the Bois and by the Boulevard de Clichy to her home. She had made up her mind. Nothing should shake it. A little happiness she was still to have ; she would count every minute of it, and press it to her heart. But all the time she would be undermining her lover's patience. He should come to feel that for both of them the end of happiness was being reached. The break should be his. All that troubled him now she must repeat and increase. Better that he should lose patience and money, and that his present love for her should change and lessen, than that she should harm for ever his life and his sons' lives. She loved him too deeply, too sincerely. Better perhaps it would be that she should die ; and she had thought of that way out—but she knew that she had not the courage. No, it was simple, the plan she had formed : Gerard should be sure that the Illona he met in Aix was the true Illona and that for a little while she had been worthy of all his love, but he should be sure too that in those happy months had flamed up the last heat of her real character but that she had been too long in her world to recapture permanently her young simplicity.

BOOK III

. . . tout lasse.



CHAPTER I

MY dear Gerard, there are some things I do understand: woman is one of them—no, that's ridiculous; you can't understand women, but you can understand the right way to treat women, and that is what I claim to have mastered. I give you my word that I'm ashamed of myself when I have to appear before Sam Evans and plead the case of a woman. No, it doesn't matter a damn whether she's the offender or the poor victim, she's almost always in the wrong; she's generally not played fair. Women would be all very well if one kept them in their place—but that's impossible nowadays. You know that stuff of Coventry Patmore's: 'Ah, wasteful woman, she who may on her sweet self set her own price'? I don't think I ever read the whole poem and perhaps he draws some other moral when he gets to the end, but he's right enough at the beginning. Woman sets her own price on what she's got to sell—and she gets it. It's not our fault that every now and then she makes a bad bargain. My point though is that she drives her bargains with her eyes open—and makes a fuss afterwards. She's not a gentleman; she hasn't the sporting instinct; she's

deceptive through and through. Oh yes, you may say it's the result of ages or of the way she's been brought up. I dare say: I only deal with the facts. She doesn't play the game. Your badly treated little woman is also practically always a perfect little devil. Mild—oh yes, but you don't have to raise Cain to be a devil. No, Gerard, don't talk to me about women: they're an imposition, a fraud. Your conception of women, everyone's conception, is dictated by them: it's a graceful fiction."

It was Gervase Blundell who held these extreme views and he was expounding them to his elder brother. He had arrived in Paris without giving any notice and had descended on the rue Cambon and had told Gerard that he must come to dine that night at Paillard's: "We see too little of one another, old chap, and I've got a lot to talk to you about." Gerard was enjoying his dinner but he had long ago grown tired of hearing Gervase's views about women. He remonstrated gently and Gervase started again:

"Yes, of course; I know: you're married—we'll come to that directly. Incidentally it puts you out of court. Marriage is one of the ways in which women tie men up, so that they are absolutely prevented from telling the truth. Anything one says about women that isn't entirely complimentary might be considered a reflection on one's wife—so one must keep quiet. If one is not married they remind one that one has got, or that one had, a mother. Well, I'm not married nowadays and I never remember seeing my mother, so every now and then I choose to tell the truth. I

know a great deal about wives, and something about mothers. I never met a wife whose first move if she met a pleasant man was not to get him to sympathise with her; and as for mothers—well, I can tell you that a mother's love is not all that it's cracked up to be. But I didn't get you to come here to tell you my views about women: you know them already. What I wanted to talk to you about was the way in which you're behaving. Do you know, old chap, you're getting talked about and you're running a considerable risk?"

"Whatever do you mean, Gervase?" Gerard felt staggered at this sudden attack. It could only point to one thing, and he was absolutely unprepared. He put however a bold face on it.

"I mean, my dear boy, that you can't spend night after night going about Paris with a dancer from the Trianon, you can't allow yourself to be described in that world as her lover, without its getting back to London."

"Well?"

"As a matter of fact I saw it all with those very eyes before I heard a word about it. I was over here a week ago—just for a couple of nights—and I went into the Esqueline—that's the name of the place, isn't it?—and found you there. You didn't see me: your back was turned to the door; but I saw you and I wondered what you were doing in that galley, and I came out rather than embarrass you and didn't think much more about it. But the next day going back in the train I met young Walker of the Embassy. He dotted the i's for me. No, he didn't say much—incidentally he hadn't

heard you were married—but I'm not a fool and I know what you are doing as well as if I were doing it myself."

Here, before him and not to be evaded, was a position which Gerard had never contemplated. That he might be seen by people who would recognise him he had known was possible but he had hoped that it was unlikely. He had gambled on that chance, and, very clearly, he had lost. "Well?" he asked again. "Certainly, my dear Gervase, you do seem to know a great deal about my movements. And then?"

"There isn't any 'and then?' about it, Gerard! You are not like me: you are domestic and devoted to your wife and family and all that sort of thing. I drew a blank; you didn't: Mary's a good sort. Really, you know, she doesn't deserve that you should play her this kind of trick. Why the devil you're doing it I can't think. You've got your children to consider. I don't see much of you and Mary nowadays, but I'm pretty sure she wouldn't put up with what you're doing if she found out—and I'm quite sure that she's never given you any excuse——"

"She hasn't: you're right there."

"Of course. But she might divorce you and you wouldn't like that, and it wouldn't be good for Vivian and her brothers. So do pull up. You're too old to start sowing your wild oats. I suppose you've been so jolly respectable all your life that you're breaking out now. However, I'm quite serious, Gerard. I came over on purpose. No, not altogether disinterestedly—it wouldn't be good for me if there was a second Blundell scandal. I didn't see the girl you were with

the other night—but I don't suppose you're in love, are you?"

Gerard looked at his brother and Gervase looked at some old brandy he was drinking and at the ash of his cigar. There was a minute's silence, and then Gerard answered:

"I'll be quite frank with you, Gervase. At present I feel that if there's a scandal I can't help it. But there won't be. *I am* what you'd call 'in love.' I can't help that either."

"In love with a dancer from the Trianon?"

"Certainly. Why not? There are dancers and dancers. But we won't talk of that if you don't mind. I'm in love, or I love very much—you can put it either way."

"I suppose you think she's in love with you."

"I don't think, Gervase; I know. With your beastly cynical and rotten way of looking at women you wouldn't believe it—but it doesn't matter whether you believe it or not: it's true."

"And I suppose she costs you a lot—eh?"

"No, she does not cost me a lot."

"I admire your evasion of my question, Gerard, and after all it isn't my business. But do I understand that you're willing to be divorced for her and lose your children for her and marry her?"

"No, I am not willing to be divorced for her. I don't love Mary any the less because of this affair. Frankly, that's one of the odd things about it. I don't altogether understand myself. And I certainly am not willing to lose my children for her. And as for marrying—

well, I never considered marriage in connection with her because it was out of the question any way; but if I were free I don't suppose I'd be able to help marrying her."

"And you won't give her up—for Mary's sake and the children's?"

"No, I won't give her up, Gervase: I couldn't. Perhaps she'll give me up some day but I couldn't give her up. She depends on me—and I depend on her too. I tried once and it didn't work. It's an accident that she's a dancer——"

"It always is, my dear Gerard; but don't let's talk any more about it. I've done my duty in warning you. And to-morrow I shall go back to London. I wish you well out of it all. . . . And now as it's only nine o'clock you'd better take me somewhere that'll amuse me for a couple of hours or so. What about the Grand Guignol—or, if it's fine enough, the Ambassadeurs? At midnight you'll be free to go home—but you won't go!"

CHAPTER II

IT is presumably a question of mood and of temperament. There are men to whom Gerard's manner of life would be quite incomprehensible. To each his folly. They would pardon no doubt his first deviation from what is considered the moral norm, but they would describe his abandonment to happiness in Aix and in Provence as an idiocy, and they would have no words for his stupidity in walking again with open eyes into the entanglement from which circumstance had apparently freed him. The truth is that Gerard did not stop to think, could not stop indeed. Vaguely he knew that to continue in this way of life was impossible, that somewhere, some time, something would crack. But for the present he was in love and enslaved, enslaved by passion and folly, and what would happen next week or next month or next year he did not pause to consider. To Mary and the children he tried to be fair: he did not neglect them; Mary did not need deceiving: she deceived herself. Such preoccupations as he allowed himself were not concerned with the household at St Cloud but with money. He was spending ever so much too much. He determined that this should not continue.

He would stop it, if not to-day then soon. And in the meantime it was a considerable consolation to remember that he had had no period of extravagance in his youth, that he had been sobriety and respectability personified, and that, after all, he was not, not yet at least, actually embarrassing himself financially by what he was doing. In fact with regard to the present his eyes were open, and the future he refused to take into account. Things would surely come right.

Of course he was worried that his brother should have heard of his infatuation. That he should know of it was bad enough, but that he should have heard of it was worse. But perhaps it was natural that Gervase should have heard of it just because he was his brother: for other people he had no particular interest; he was just one of several thousands of Englishmen in Paris with names that meant nothing very much to people who heard them. He had not any distinctions that made it likely that he would be talked about—and at the worst there were very few people who could talk. He had long ago realised that the world that frequents Montmartre is not a big one. After all, vice has not so many votaries. One sees again and again the same people, the same men and women at Fysher's and Delmas', at the 'Trianon and the Abbaye, at Aix and at the races, and by now most of them would know him by sight; but they had their own preoccupations and it was certain that they would not have enough curiosity about him to inquire into his identity or to discuss his behaviour. It was a small circle, an intimate circle, and although now and again a strange

Englishman drifted through it, he did not stop long enough to be dangerous.

Gervase Blundell had proved right: his brother had not gone home.

The low ceiling of the narrow small room at the Esqueline sent back the acrid heat in waves; it was four in the morning. An undersized Italian was singing a sentimental ballad with all the airs of a favourite of grand opera to an audience that paid no attention to his efforts. Why should they indeed? He did not sing well, and his predatory eyes were already wondering to what fools he could sell the little printed sheet of his music at a price one hundredfold what it cost him. Not many fools came to the Esqueline but those that did come were fair game.

It was a strange crowd. It sat round the room in couples, drinking champagne and here and there staying its appetite with poached eggs floating in *consommé*. Most of the women looked as if they never went to bed, their companions as if dissipation were the business of their lives. If one wished to see this gay world as it was when it was not posturing for the amusement of the money-bringing visitor, the Esqueline was the very place. . . .

Suddenly the little Italian ceased and in place of his indifferent notes a divine voice floated into the room. "That's Sammarcagno, Gerard," Illona said, and explained that Sammarcagno was a star of opera. The singer was amusing himself. The song was one of his own favourites and he could not resist the pleasure of

startling the air with the beauty which was at his command. The room stilled—for a minute. Only one stanza would the singer give, and when it was over everyone took up his affairs, his conversation, just where he had dropped them, as if such episodes were of everyday occurrence—as indeed, in one shape or another, they were.

At one of the tables sat Fleurette Mayer with a young Frenchman. She looked sad and had moreover a bemused air. “That’s ether,” Illona said; “she’ll finish herself one day with it.”

“Illona, I don’t like her.”

“That’s a pity, my dear: *I* like her though, and perhaps that’s enough. She’s a good sort when she’s not fighting, and she’s generous—she can afford to be, you know. Did you ever hear how she began to be rich? It’s amusing. It was two years ago. We were all here and it was nearly five o’clock. Jacques Mayer was sitting over there in the corner with a crowd of boys—men, I mean”—she clapped her hand to her mouth and looked comically ashamed—“and two or three girls. Fleurette was a poor little shrimp then, pretty if you will, but very good in her air, and she and Ferrat and I were quite close: we could hear everything that was said—and it wasn’t very nice, I can tell you, most of it. After a while Mayer, who was a little drunk, got up and stretched himself and said he was going home, that he was tired. ‘But I won’t go home alone,’ he said; ‘isn’t there some nice girl here that I don’t know already who’ll go home with me?’ At that Ferrat nudged Fleurette and

whispered: 'Quick, there's your chance! Offer yourself. But when the morning comes and he wants to give you money don't take it: say you went with him because you liked him. *Tu verras!* It's young Mayer. Now quick and be careful.' Fleurette, whose air of goodness was not very serious, jumped up in a moment and ran across to Mayer—you know who the Mayers are?—and took him by the arm and looked up into his eyes. I could have laughed. She had the appearance of a young girl who had never seen a man before. 'Who's this?' Mayer said rather drunkenly; 'why it's that little girl from the other side of the room. You want to come with me? *Bien*. You'll do as well as another. *Viens vite!*' and in a minute they were gone. Well, everything came about as Ferrat had planned. Mayer produced a thousand francs, Fleurette told her, and although she hadn't a dress to her back and owed for her rent she had the intelligence to remember what Ferrat had said and refused to take them. She pretended that she had always loved him, and so on. Well, he wasn't used to girls who refused money like that, and he believed her, and afterwards he bought her a house and an automobile and he kept her and actually fell in love with her. 'There wasn't any secret about it. Then his family got frightened and made him marry someone in his own class quickly, but before that happened he gave her an income of thirty thousand francs a year for her life, so that he could be sure she wouldn't need for anything.'

"And who's she with now? That Frenchman I mean. Is he Mayer's successor?"

“Oh no, my dear: that’s some *miché*. Since Mayer’s time she’s been in love—with an Argentine boy; really a boy this time. But she has no chance, *cette pauvre fille*. He was actually going to marry her; he had first to get his parents’ consent though, so he went off to Buenos Ayres and told her to follow by the next boat. She did follow, and when she got there the police wouldn’t let her off the boat. They just sent her back. You see, the boy’s father was a highly placed personage and he wasn’t going to have his son marry that way, and he arranged things so that they didn’t let her land. Poor Fleurette!”

“She soon got over it, I expect.”

“No, my dear; she never will get over it. A woman like that is so disillusioned, so disgusted with men, that if she does fall in love the man is an idol for her. But if he deceives her everything is finished for ever. That’s what has happened to Fleurette.”

“Well, I don’t like her all the same. Look at the way she behaved the other night—and you say she’s always drunk with cocaine or ether.”

“Oh, that fight with Magda. That’s nothing. They all fight; I fight myself sometimes, *tu sais*. And as for her cocaine, how can she help that? Her mother takes ether; that’s how she learned; she began as a child almost. When she was with Mayer, and afterwards with her Argentine, she didn’t take it much, but since she came back she’s got worse and worse.” •

“What’ll happen to her?”

“Heaven knows. She spends too much money and she doesn’t make much, and in spite of her *rente* she’ll

get into trouble, *pauvre gosse*. I was with her yesterday for lunch and it wasn't amusing."

"Illona——"

"Yes?"

"Illona, how can you be friends with a girl like that? She doesn't even dance. She doesn't even pretend to do any decent work for her living; she never did dance, you say; she's just a——" He paused.

"Oh, I could find you the word, my dear. You're right, but what would you? She never had a chance. And she's brave and generous and—yes—good in her way. If Mayer had married her, or that Argentine, I think she might have made a good wife—as good as most women do anyhow. All that's too late now. Some day she'll take too much ether by accident or on purpose, and that'll be the end."

"But why should you be friends with her? Why do you go and see her? I always thought that you kept yourself a little apart from these women who are like Fleurette and live on men."

Illona's eyes grew even more serious than was their wont. She waited before she answered: "Gerard, you think too much of me; you believe in me too much. *Je ne suis pas grand' chose, moi*. I'm not so very different after all from Fleurette, or from any of these girls. *Au fond* I make my money in just the same way, only I'm more careful and less generous."

"Don't say that, Illona—and it isn't true. And if it's true it's true also of every woman who dances and acts in musical comedy and things like that both here and in London."

"You're becoming too clever for me, dear, and anyhow *ça ne me regarde pas*. But you mustn't believe me better than I am. I don't give men all they want, but I give them just enough to get money out of them. If I don't sell myself it isn't because I'm better than Fleurette—no."

"You wrong yourself, Illona, and you only say that because you wish to vex me and because you're depressed to-night for some reason."

"No, I mean it all. You've seen me. You remember how I was with you when you came first to the Piccadilly. That's my life. Everyone in Paris knows it is. I do it better than the others, that's all—or I did do it better, for you have altered me a little, Gerard, *tu sais bien*."

Gerard took her hand and pressed it: "Illona, I wish I could alter it all."

"You can't, dear; I know it well. But I want you to be more with me. After all, I don't want to prevent your coming to see me dance. I was silly at Aix. You're my lover; you have the right. *Pauvre chou*, it must be dull for you hanging about Montmartre till I'm free. Now you can come to the Trianon whenever you like; I'll try not to do anything that'll make you angry, but anyhow I want you there. And I can sit down and talk to you every now and then."

Ferrat stopped their conversation. She had drifted into the room and paused for a moment to talk to Edouard, the *patron*, who had been standing at the door regarding his clients, smiling and rubbing his hands and looking more than ever a respectable

bourgeois, the father of a family. Then she had come to their table, had called for a glass and had helped herself to Gerard's champagne.

"*Bonjour, mes enfants*. We'll go now to the Pré-Catalan. It's a lovely morning. Oh no, you don't want to go home. You're becoming too respectable, Illona; you'll grow fat. That lover of yours will ruin you. I always said he was too old. It'll make him young to see the cows and to drink milk."

Illona was ready always for any semblance of a lark, and she stilled Gerard's protest even before it was uttered:

"Good idea! Gerard, you've never been to the Pré-Catalan except for lunch. I like it ever so much. Come, pay and let's go."

"No, wait 'arf a mo," Ferrat interrupted. She had once sung in London for a month—at the Coliseum—and she had brought back with her not a word of ordinary English but a good deal of slang, which she used as often wrongly as rightly, and a choice string of oaths which, she explained, had been taught her by that young English actor who had found her her engagement and who had been one of the first to recognise her talent. Now she looked in her silk bag and produced a printed leaflet. For a moment she held it in her hand: "You remember Jacqueline, Illona? You asked about her the other day. I saw her to-night at Gerny's. She's been very ill—you know all about it—and then she went away to Brittany and she's just back; but she's no use any more, *pauvre gosse*, and she's starting a shop. She had the sense to save money.

Now listen: 'Aux Fleurs de Provence' it's called—she came from Grasse, you know—and it opens to-morrow and we're to get all our things there: '*manucure, postiches, parfumerie, maroquinerie—tout est neuf, tout est frais!*' It's that place in the rue de Moscou, but she says that she's taken none of their old truck over. Now, Illona, you've got to bring him to-morrow afternoon and he shall cheer Jacqueline up by buying a lot of things for us both. Listen again: '*Tout le monde voudra profiter de cette aubaine en allant s'approvisionner au ravissant Magasin de Mademoiselle Jacqueline Vaillant.*' She says: '*un gentil vaporisateur sera offert en prime à tout acheteur de 25 francs!*'—we'll have at least two of those! Jacqueline was *bonne camarade* and she helped everyone, and we must help her—*pas?* Now you go and find an auto while I give this to Fleurette. I want all the world to be there to-morrow." And she went off on her ready errand of charity. So here, Gerard thought, was the way in which the girls in this world eked out their livelihood when their youth failed them, when they had come to the end of their power of attraction. In effect, they took in each other's washing, clinging still to the edge of gaiety, but as servants, servers, rather than as principals, priestesses.

By the time Ferrat came downstairs and rejoined her friends on the pavement she had a middle-aged man in her train, an American of a cheerful countenance whom Illona evidently knew although upstairs she had paid no attention to him: "Hullo, Ferdie, when did you come over? I thought you were safe in Chicago—"

isn't it?—selling stockings. And that reminds me I want some more. I've worn out or given away all those six dozen pairs you sent me. One wears stockings out quickly when one dances, you know."

Ferdie smiled: "You shouldn't wear the best grade of our Osiris silk stockings costing five dollars a pair except on special occasions, should she, Ferrat? You shall have some more, all the same. But won't you introduce me to your friend and explain why he's going to be so crowded? It's Ferrat's fault, and I'll sit with the chauffeur."

However, they all packed into the taxi and in a minute or two they were running up the Avenue de Villiers. People of the common sort were already going about their duty; men were watering the roadway; the milkman and the baker were on their rounds: Paris was preparing herself for another day. All the town was flooded in eager sunshine. As they darted into the Bois they met cars that were coming back from the same morning revelry that they were seeking, and yet other cars, more swift than their own, overtook and passed them: Gerard recognised their occupants. He had seen them before on this same night: he seemed to have seen them on so many nights. For the moment, remembering that this was the road to St Cloud, he wondered what he was doing in this world. . . . And then he looked at Illona, whose dancing dress only partly hidden by her cloak and whose uncovered head gave her a bizarre air. Through half-closed eyes and with a tolerant smile she was regarding her American friend, and her ivory face, flushed a little by the sun,

seemed to him more beautiful and more pitiful than it had ever been. Forgetting the resentment that he had been carrying vaguely in his mind against her, he put out his hand and took one of hers and then bent forward and kissed her on the lips. He thought that tears came into her eyes.

With a jerk the taxi drew up at the door. Jumping out, Gerard told the man to wait. In the huge half-glass pavilion lights still hung cerily. Not many people remained but they were evidently bent on making up with their noise and gaiety for their lack of number. The orchestra still played, dancers were fitfully dancing. Most of those present were English, Americans and Argentines, young men with tired, knowing faces, old men vice-marked, young girls commercially intent on an appearance of pleasure, and young-old women with yellow hair and powdered fatigued skins. It was the hour of drunkenness or of disillusion. The very waiters were soiled and worn; the air was oppressive, heavy with smoke; dust seemed to hover over everything, the dust of decay. And yet with all these qualities the scene had beauty, the faded, corroded beauty of a Toulouse-Lautrec whose background had been repainted by Le Sidaner.

To Ferrat at least everything was as it should be. She exchanged nods of greeting with half the people in the room, found a table, settled her party and then in answer to the waiter's mute inquiry indicated Gerard as the host. The American however had his own ideas: he intercepted the wine list and called for a magnum of champagne and some biscuits. "This is on me," he said,

and he refused to listen to Gerard's protests. "I've only just arrived in this old burg and I live so quietly in Chicago that I've got money to burn. Over there I'm a regular tight-wad and so jolly respectable that they want me to be trustee of the girls' school. Paris is where I get my fun. Hullo, there's the Judge. I'll call him over; may I?"

"The Judge" was another American, very old, very thin, clean shaven, with a bald head and a neck like a chicken's after all the feathers have been pulled out. He did not at all come up to Gerard's conception of what a judge should be, but he was clearly introduced as Judge Merchison. On what kind of bench he sat Gerard never learnt. It was, he said, his first visit to Paris, and he had seen the Louvre and Notre Dame and had spent hours in Henry's Bar—"You'll find me there any day at twelve o'clock," he announced proudly—had dined at the Tour d'Argent, had been to the races and had won six hundred dollars, and the thing which mostly stuck in his memory was the "Scotch high-ball" that someone had given him on the top of the Eiffel Tower. Gerard, although he made his living out of alcohol, took some time to discover that a Scotch high-ball was American for an ordinary whisky-and-soda!

The Judge and Ferdie were evidently great friends. They talked at one another. Ferdie rallied his countryman on the way he spent his time now that he had left New York on the other side of the ocean. The Judge looked at him with semi-tipsy gravity and adjusted his horn-rimmed spectacles: "*Ish ki bibble!*" he said.

"What does that mean?" Gerard asked.

They both laughed. "It's good American and it means a lot"; but they would not explain what that lot was. They were like two schoolboys, gay, irresponsible, stupid. Ferdie evidently had no reverence for his friend's judicial functions. "You know his name's William," he told them. "In the old days he had a little hair; it was white of course. He had a row with one of the papers and they came out with a fine caricature of him taking bribes or making money in some discreditable way. Isn't that right, Judge?"

The Judge preened himself and nodded, adding: "Don't you believe him, my dear, he's a champion jollier."

Ferdie went on: "Under the picture were these words:—

*'You are old, Father William,' the young man said,
'And your long hair is fast turning white—
Yet they say you've got nothing but bone in your head,
And I strongly suspect they are right.'*

Now you know the kind of man he is. 'The older they get the wickeder they get, and if I were you two girls I should fight shy of him."

Judge Merchison looked more than ever senile and also very delighted. Clearly he resented the fact that the conversation veered away now from his record and personality, and he devoted himself to the champagne. In a minute or two the bottle was empty. He drew Ferdie's attention to the fact:

"Say, isn't that hell to tell the Captain!" Ferdie answered. "We'll have another—here, boy."

But Ferrat had other views. "You two are not going

to have any more champagne. We've only one taxi and I don't want to carry two drunken men back to Paris. Illona and I intend to dance and then we'll go out and have some milk. You pay the bill in the meantime, Ferdie."

The Judge looked now at Gerard: "Say, young fellow: do you really know this man?"

Gerard answered that the pleasure had been a short one.

"Well, so much the better. I want to warn you against him. He isn't respectable. He knows me because I once sent him to the penitentiary for stealing a brace of ducks and he always presumes on the acquaintance. But I'm going to stop it. I'll have him arrested when he gets back for going about Paris with a woman who isn't his wife. Say, Ferdie, that wasn't exactly a peach I saw you with at the Café de Paris to-day."

Ferdie looked resigned: "You don't buy a watch for the case; you buy it for the works," he answered.

Gerard had tired of their chaff and was watching the two girls. They were dancing together. Illona with her long hair and short dancing dress made a fit companion for Ferrat, whose gown as usual was tailor-made, severe, clean of line, and whose hair—for she had taken off her hat—was tossing gaily in the wind. It was almost the hour at which respectable people take their breakfast, but these two girls danced as if they had never known fatigue, exquisitely, with every step expressed faithfully, with no movement shirked. Gerard, who should have had his fill of dancing, yet watched

them with delight, and he realised more than he had ever done the hold that Illona had on him and the love that he had for her. Too soon the music ceased, and the girls came back to the table. The Americans were still quarrelling humorously, but Ferrat refused to sit down. "Please yourselves," she said; "Illona and I are going to see the cows. You'll come, won't you, Gerard?"

Gerard had hardly realised that they were real cows that he was being taken to see, but they were real cows and in a real stable smelling of cows and of bovine things. Ferrat claimed to know them all, and certainly the cowman knew her, and he knew Illona too. "I used to come here every morning nearly last year, *tu sais*," she explained; and then she demanded the whereabouts of a monkey that she had promised to show Gerard. . . . "There it is, on the grass by the window," the cowman told her, and she ran out and came back with the little animal on her arm. He also recognised her, it seemed, and was content to let her play with him. Children and animals succumbed to Illona at sight.

In the meantime Ferrat had tucked up her skirt and was actually milking one of the cows: "I learned to do this in Brittany," she said. Gerard, looking at her, wondered whether she was irredeemably of the night world they had left on the other side of the wall and in Paris, vicious, corrupt, destined for death, or whether she was what she so often looked: simple, young, happy, irresponsible, a flower. . . . The two Americans broke into his thoughts. They arrived arm-

in-arm and the Judge demanded that a cow should at once be prepared for his ministrations. But when it was ready he looked at the animal with a tipsy gravity and announced that it had too ill-tempered a face to give good milk. Ferdie appealed to him to set to work : "Shoot, Luke, or give father the gun," he exclaimed, but in the end the cow remained un milked. It was a patient creature and did not even protest when the younger of the two men insisted on attempting to ride it astride. Nor was the cowman ill-pleased. He knew very well that the animal's hairs would come off on the black suit of Monsieur and that the trouble he would then take to brush them off would be worth at least a louis. . . .

It was a quarter past eight when they got back to Paris. The Judge was so pleased to have made Gerard's acquaintance that he almost embraced him at parting : "Say, young fellow, you come round to Henry's and fetch me. Any day. We'll lunch together then and I'll introduce you to my little piece. She was ill last night so she let me out alone. She's all right, ain't she, Ferdie ?"

Ferdie looked at him and then looked at Gerard and winked : "You're right, Judge : she certainly is all the birds in the tree."

CHAPTER III

THE night which had passed was not one which Gerard remembered with any satisfaction. He felt himself too good, and too old for the matter of that, to spend his time day after day, and to wreck his health, for the sake of such dull and dusty pleasures. He had seen by now both sides of the picture; he had been to a great measure admitted behind the scenes; and while he was not young enough to be carried off his feet by the glitter and sordid excitement of it all, he was at the same time too young to be sucked into it as by a maelstrom—as Ferdie evidently had been and his egregious friend, to both of whom Montmartre and all that it stood for represented not only an escape from life but an actual intoxication, a form of drug-taking. His own interest in the world in which he was becoming so well known began and almost ended with his love, his infatuation, for Illona. If she were no longer his he could leave it and never again pass through those portals of the devil. But while she remained his he knew that half his tastes and habits, his interests and normal affections, would be suspended. His love of her held him in sure bondage. He was powerless to free himself.

But he was not powerless to realise his folly. More and more was it being forced upon him that he was playing ducks and drakes not only with his health but also with such resources as he had saved or had kept apart from his investments in Pall Mall. He could not understand Illona. Thoughtful, responsible even, in everything else, where money was concerned she seemed entirely without wisdom, prudence, or consideration. Her early regret and awkwardness about asking him for money had almost disappeared, and her difficulties seemed endless, the difficulties that had piled up during the winter and early spring before he had arrived in Paris. In large part no doubt it was his own fault: never, since that day in Aix station when she had announced her dislike of trains, had he attempted to check her, to thwart her whims; he had refused her nothing for which she had asked; he had, as far as he knew, given her no idea that all these notes and gold pieces that she caused him to throw about so heedlessly were in truth of consequence to him. Here, too, he had drifted: if he had had any clear notion of what was to happen in the future he would no doubt have acted differently, but he was in love, and conscience, passion, loyalty, prudence and love made ill housemates in his brain. Yes, no doubt it was his own fault. He ought to have counted more on her affection. In his heart he never doubted that she cared for him far, far too deeply and too sincerely to allow him to be troubled by the result of her whims. He ought, he knew, to take some step; but when and what? Oh well, people would be going away from Paris directly; the season would be at

an end; something would suggest itself; and in the meantime he must do the best he could. After all it was still true that if he was spending his capital now he was in a sense only making up for his past carefulness.

And through these days Illona was miserable; when she was alone she would cry herself to sleep; she had now to act a part, to pretend; and, all the time, she knew that she was harming her lover, rendering him unhappy, hurting his belief in himself and, which was worse, his belief in her. If she had never seen his children and if she had never stumbled on that question of the expense of sending his boys to school she might not have guessed that Gerard was poorer than the men she had known; and now that she had discovered that he was not rich and now that she could see, by a thousand little hitherto unheeded signs, that money was of consequence to him, now she could not set herself to work to help him, to save him trouble, but she had, according to her plan, rather to redouble her demands and her exactions, to belie her character, to seem more thoughtless and more exigent and lighter than she really was. And yet she knew that she could have made him happy. If only he had been single, if he had had no ties, no wife, no children, she could have taught herself to help him, she could for him have learned everything that at present she lacked, she could have brought so much of comfort and delight into his life. Her love for him was more now than it had been. She saw his faults and his weaknesses, his selfishness above all, and she loved him none the less. Sometimes

she felt towards him as a mother might, and sometimes as a daughter. She was never content save in his presence, never happy save on his shoulder. And she had to kill all his love for her. He was to see her as the world might see her, light, foolish, wasteful. He was to lose patience with her, to say to himself that she was not worth his love, not now at least, whatever she might have been during those golden weeks in Savoy and Provence when for both of them the hours, the days, passed quickly and London and his duty and Paris and her life were so far away that they were scarcely remembered. Of these things she could not bear to think, but she could never get them out of her mind. Gerard in a little while would be hers no longer, and it would be her fault, it would be through her wish. But it was better so. She saw through her tears the eyes of Gerard's boy.



CHAPTER IV

PARIS, sun-baked and sun-tired, was emptying fast. The Grand Prix over, everyone who counted himself of importance had gone away to rest for a few days before starting again on a new round of pleasure and dullness at one or other of the half-dozen Parises by the sea. Illona had received and had refused several offers. Even Piaci had asked her to come back; they wanted her at Ostende, at Deauville, at Dieppe. If Gerard had not existed she would have gone to Deauville, but he was hers still, her lover, her servant, her master. He had to stop in Paris and she would not leave him. It might be possible for him to take a few days' holiday now and again, he told her, and she was content to wait on his movements, dancing the while at the Trianon. Victor became in the hot months more polite to the casual visitor. In the absence of his regular clients, the tourist and the casual American were both worth cultivating. Delmas and Fysher, Palmyre and Gerny closed naturally: their clients scattered themselves; but Montmartre remained Montmartre, and it was always worth while to keep open at

the Trianon, the Abbaye, the Rat Mort—to keep open and to be a little less particular as to the kind of visitor who crowded their rooms.

Edouard at the Esqueline never thought of taking a holiday. His upper chamber remained always a haven of refuge for those poor souls who could not get away, those daughters of folly and of joy who were held in Paris either by the exigence of their lovers or the emptiness of their purses. Ferrat was at Beg-Meil with Delmas; Magda had gone to Ostende; Dedic, Marie Blanche and *la petite Alice* were at Vichy. Gerard grew more than ever tired of the place, and yet nowadays he had to sit in it night after night. Mary and the children had taken themselves off to Pont-Aven for a fortnight or so, and the villa at St Cloud was closed. It was understood that he would go to Brittany for week-ends if he could, but this was unlikely; it was still necessary, he said, for him to go often to London. Mary never questioned his decision nor doubted that it was reasonable. The children were learning French and that was worth the sacrifice. In the meantime he had a room at the Grand Hotel.

No, it was dull for him at the Esqueline. That one of Illona's friends whom he liked least, Fleurette Mayer, was almost the only girl he knew in the place. And she certainly was growing neither more sensible nor more prudent. Illona was frankly troubled about her and her drugs. She would disappear for days together and would come back smelling so rankly of ether that the windows had to be opened, and people who did not care for her and who had the courage

refused to sit down in her neighbourhood. Not that she grew less pretty. She looked sad, tired, beautiful and good.

And then one day came the end.

Illona, who always proclaimed that she was never hungry in the morning, had refused even to touch her roll. That and other things had put Gerard in bad humour. He was late too for his work, and he hated being late. But Illona hated even more to have him leave her, and day after day she would invent some new pretext for keeping him a few minutes longer at her side. Now at length he was prepared to start and he had his hat and stick in his hand and had bent down to kiss her for the last and twentieth time when the electric bell in the hall sounded. He drew back, startled a little. A caller of any kind at so early an hour was unusual. They could hear Jeanne open the front door and some muttered conversation, and then, almost without knocking and looking white and troubled, she burst into the room.

“Madame, it is a letter from Meudon. It is about Madame Fleurette; read quickly, Madame.”

Someone was sobbing in the hall and, leaving Illona for a moment, Gerard went out to look. A young girl, evidently a *bonne*, was leaning against the wall, crying. She had brought the letter. Going back he looked to Illona for an explanation, but she was still reading, turning and re-turning the page. “Jeanne,” he said, “I don’t know what the matter is, but go into the kitchen now and give that child some coffee, or,

better still, some tea. She'll be ill if you don't"; and he turned again to the bed.

Illona looked up with a grey and troubled face: "Gerard, Fleurette is dead. Oh, oh, I am so unhappy!"

"Fleurette dead! It's impossible! Why, we saw her only yesterday morning."

"It's true, dear, and they've sent for me to go out there. I must dress at once. Here, look!" And she tossed the letter across for him to read, and began to cry softly to herself.

The letter was short. Fleurette was dead. Her maid had found her dead in her bed that morning when she had gone into the room to fetch her mistress's clothes. That was all. She had had one friend with her in the house, the girl with whom she shared it, Suzanne Hettinger, of whom Gerard knew vaguely, and it was she who had written to Illona begging her to go immediately, for just now when all the world was away there was no one else on whom she could call for assistance.

"But you needn't go, Illona. I don't want you to go. After all, neither Fleurette nor this girl who writes to you was so very much your friend. Surely she can look after things without dragging you in. You don't know what Fleurette Mayer died of. There may be all sorts of talk, too, and then you'd be sorry."

"I must go, my dear. Besides, I do know what Fleurette died of. It was ether. She used to inhale or drink it every night and every morning. I knew it would happen—and so really did she."

"That is all the more reason, Illona, for your not going."

"I know best, Gerard: I shall go. *Pauvre fille*, she had not so many real friends; Ferrat is away; her relations are nothing. I would never deserve to be happy again if I did not go to help her now that she is dead. They send for me because I am a little more serious and more responsible, I suppose. Now, go off quickly, *chéri*, and I will dress and I shall be there in less than an hour. *Mais écoute*: where will you lunch? I'll telephone to you if I can and tell you if I shall be back for dinner."

Gerard went away in no very good temper. He was shocked at Fleurette's death because it was so sudden and because she was both young and pretty, but he had never liked her and he could not pretend to share Illona's distress. There was no reason at all, as far as he could see, why she should mix herself up with the matter. All the care in the world would not bring her friend back to life. Common sense demanded that she should keep away.

When Illona telephoned to him she could only explain that there were "complications," and that she wanted him to come down later in the day and meet her at the station so that they might dine together before she went back for a little to the villa; after that she would return to Paris with him. He gave a reluctant assent.

At the station Gerard gave up his return ticket by mistake and insisted on going back for it. Illona protested: "What's the use? I've got a car here and we should motor back anyhow."

"Motor back! Whose car? Fleurette Mayer's?"

"No, she hadn't a car any more. I took one to come down. I was in such a hurry to get here. I couldn't wait for a train. And I told the man to stop for me."

"And how much is that going to cost?" Gerard's face grew stormy. 'This was really too much of a good thing.

"I don't know. You know what they charge for a day. I got it at the place we always go to."

"Well, I don't think it was at all necessary."

She looked at him in astonishment; he had never spoken so before. Then she took his arm and pressed it: "Gerard, *te fache pas!* I am so, so unhappy. I never thought you'd mind my taking a car." She began to cry, and he looked angrily about for fear she might be seen. But it was a quiet road.

Illona continued: "It was a good thing I did come quickly. All was in confusion. Suzanne thought the doctor would say that death was due to heart failure, but apparently he got frightened and changed his mind and—well, anyhow I found the police here."

"The police! Why the police?"

"Because of the ether and the opium and what people said about the house. They are examining everybody and everything. Suzanne has been arrested and two of the servants, and they only didn't arrest me because I wasn't there when they arrived and because I could show that I had been sent for. Besides, I was able to swear I had never been in the place before."

"I told you not to go, Illona. Why were you so stubborn and stupid? But you can leave now, I suppose—and you needn't come back?"

"I need. They have no one else to help them. I must do what I can. I found the address of Fleurette's mother and she came, but—would you believe it?—she was drunk when she arrived, drunk with ether too. I must arrange everything—everything that the police will allow to be done."

Gerard listened while Illona told her story.

It seemed that Fleurette and her friend, tired of the Avenue de Messine and the rue Marbeau, and thinking to combine at Meudon the delights of the country and the habits of the town, took this tree-embowered villa in which Fleurette was now lying and came down to it from time to time and rested or, more often, gave parties, parties which scandalised their neighbours, beginning at midnight or later and going on often till long after the sun had risen. Strange stories were told. Nothing actually transpired as to what went on, for the servants were discreet, but on such occasions almost a fleet of motor-cars would bring the guests from Paris, cars that certainly belonged to some of the best-known and richest names in France. When they had gone the villa would relapse into the utmost quietude. Its inhabitants were thought to be sleeping off the effects of their dissipation. Later the doors would open and the two girls would go back to Paris, and nothing would happen until they returned. . . . Last night there had been no visitors. Fleurette's maid was at the theatre and, coming home soon after midnight, had gone to see if her mistress needed anything. She found her in bed and, not for the first time, in a state of stupefaction. A litre bottle of ether stood on the table by

her side. Taking out of her mistress's hands the two spirit-steeped pads of cotton-wool from which evidently she had been inhaling, the maid had watched for a little and then, satisfied that her mistress slept, had gone off to her own bed. Nothing had happened which had not happened before. She had not even called her mistress's friend; there was no need. At seven o'clock in the morning she woke up and went almost at once to her mistress's room. She found her dead. In some terrible crisis of her drunkenness Fleurette had rolled her sheet round her head; the bottle of ether was three parts empty: the poor child, finding no longer the cotton-wool from which to inhale, had drunk and drunk the poison. There had happened at last what her friends had foretold, and that at which she herself had laughed. "I will never believe it was an accident," Illona added; "always she thought of her Argentine. I think she died for him. It is easy to do that when one loves, *tu sais*."

Then the whole house was aroused. The doctor was summoned. He had attended both Fleurette and her friend before. He was no stranger to their rooms and must have guessed something of their habits. Suzanne had been beside herself, but when she sent her messenger off to Illona she believed that no one need know that Fleurette had died of anything more unusual than heart failure. . . . "But the good man changed his mind and the magistrate came and his assistants and all day they have been examining and investigating. They've found enough cocaine and ether and opium in the house to poison a couple of regiments.

And I think they've even found out where Fleurette got it from—Montmartre will have something to think about if they're right. However, I shan't be sorry. Oh, how I detest the stuff!"

"And I suppose they can't make any plans about the funeral yet?"

"Yes, I've arranged everything—the funeral will be in three days. You see they've—the doctor has—taken all that he wants for his autopsy." Illona broke down at the thought and cried again. Evidently she felt bitterly the death of her friend, and Gerard forbore from arguing with her when, after a little, she declared that she must go back to the house, and that then they would return to Paris together. She must dance that night whatever happened. Victor was counting on her.

When they were in the car she was in better spirits. The details of the funeral ceremony had occupied and were interesting her. It was to be a grand funeral. Fleurette's mother wished it, and Fleurette would have wished it herself. All Montmartre that was in reach of Meudon would surely come or would send flowers. There would be a procession of mourners half a mile long. "She was such a *brave fille* and so kind and generous. All the world loved her and they will all want to pay her respect"; and in her absorption in the work that the arrangements would entail it was clear that Illona, woman-like, was for the moment forgetting her sorrow.

CHAPTER V

THE papers next morning were full of Fleurette Mayer. Gerard abandoned himself to hearing of nothing else for days, but he was not pleased when he found that Illona had to go back to Meudon and proposed in effect to spend all and every day there until the funeral was over. He saw no sufficient reason for this. It meant that he would either have to go to Meudon himself in the late afternoon to fetch her or that he would spend his evenings alone. It was hot and tiring in Paris and he did not feel that he deserved this extra irritation, nor did he think that Fleurette Mayer deserved so much attention and affection from her friend. However, he saw that it had to be.

That day passed without further complications. Illona went and returned. She was full of what the examining magistrate and his people had to say of Suzanne Hettinger's plight and of her own sorrow that she had taken no more serious steps to wean Fleurette from her vice. Gerard did his best to reassure her, but in his heart he was willing to consign the whole Meudon household to the devil.

It was the next morning and he was in his office, suffering from the heat and from the lack of enough to do.

"You are wanted on the telephone, sir."

There was no instrument in his own room, and Gerard looked up in disgust at the interruption. "Who wants me?"

"I don't know, sir: it's a lady, but she won't give her name."

Now it was thoroughly understood between Gerard and Illona that she was never to telephone to his office. It was a restriction that she neither liked nor understood but had loyally obeyed. He knew, however, that it must be Illona who was calling him now, and he forgave her in advance, for he was sure that something must have occurred that made it essential that she should speak to him without delay.

"Hullo, who is that?" he asked.

"Is that you?" He recognised her voice.

"Yes—yes—what is it?"

"Gerard, I can't speak on the telephone, but I must see you at once. If I take a train now can you meet me at the station?"

"It's not very convenient but I will come—under the big clock then. When? At one five. All right. Good-bye."

Illona arrived white and trembling. "Gerard, dear, you must help me. *Ecoute, mon chéri*: you know that Fleurette's funeral is to be to-morrow. Everything was arranged. Oh, Gerard! I find she has no money left. She spent all she had. A lawyer was there this morning and she's even spent her next quarter's *rente*. He wants it back, poor man: I don't know how she got it out of him. But first let me tell you what happened.

when I got there. Of course, except in Meudon, no one knew of her death till yesterday, and this morning there are letters from half the people who used to supply her with things—her dressmaker, her *lingère*, her garage, and so on. They all want money. Indeed I was right when I said—you remember—that she spent more than she had and was getting into trouble. At first I didn't worry so very much, because I thought of her jewels—they were worth a lot, especially her pearl necklace. Of course the police had them all in the meantime, but we looked at them and when I took the necklace in my hands I knew at once: it is false. And then soon after we found in her desk papers which showed she had sold practically everything that she had of value and had replaced it with a copy which no one would give anything for. Poor little Fleurette! Now everyone will be angry, and I don't know what will happen to her mother."

"But what has it got to do with you and me, dear? We haven't anything to do with her bills."

"No, of course not. But there's the funeral, Gerard. I ordered it all, and although I'm not responsible, yet they've made all the arrangements. That man came this morning too. He'd heard somehow that she left a lot of debts—I suppose he'd been making inquiries—and he wanted to be sure about his money. It was going to cost altogether nearly three thousand francs. So I had to tell him the truth, and I told him too that he must make a much simpler arrangement. He was angry to begin with, but now it's settled. It's going to cost much less—only a thousand francs for everything. *Pauvre*

gosse, she wouldn't be pleased. All the coach will be covered with flowers, Gerard—there will be enough flowers for two or three coaches, I think. I never saw such flowers. All sorts of people have sent them. One big wreath has come from Mayer—I know it's from him; and the waiters at the Esqueline have sent one, and one of the best is from Victor: he has a good heart, that man, after all."

Gerard was not greatly interested. "Well, I don't see anything in all that for you to come to Paris about, and least of all can I see why you should have telephoned to me: you know I didn't want you to do that."

"Gerard!" Illona looked as if he had struck her. For a moment she put her hand up to her face: "But, Gerard, I came because I want your help, and the matter wouldn't wait."

"My help? What in?" His voice was hard, unsympathetic.

"About the funeral, Gerard. I had to promise to give the man the thousand francs myself, and to-night. Otherwise he would do nothing at all, would not even begin any work for to-morrow."

Gerard looked at her—they were seated opposite one another at a table in a little restaurant near where they had met—and then slowly shook his head. "No, my dear, I won't give you a thousand francs for that. You seem always to think I am made of money. I'm not. A thousand francs is a great deal. In reason I'll give you what you want both for yourself and for your mother—although I wish you'd remember occasionally that you can overdo things—but I see no reason for burying

BITTERSWEET

Fleurette Mayer. I hardly knew her ; I didn't like her ; I didn't like your knowing her ; she wasn't your sort. What has happened is her own fault, and you have nothing whatever to do with it. Now be reasonable, Illona ; let's telephone to the man and tell him you can't do it. Really, it isn't sensible."

Illona had grown paler. "Gerard, do you mean that after all you have given me and after all we are to one another you refuse to give me a thousand francs for Fleurette?"

"Yes, my dear, I do, and I shall continue to refuse : the fact is, if you want to know, I can't afford it."

"But I'll make economies, dear : I'll be sensible, *tu verras!* But give me this money, Gerard : I want it so, and it isn't for myself, you know."

"I do know. If you wanted it for yourself I dare say I'd give it you ; I always do. But if you can make economies why haven't you made them? You promised you would. You said '*tu verras*' long ago—but I haven't seen that you've been more careful. No, I haven't got a thousand francs to spare, and that's all there is to it."

Illona leaned back in her chair. The ground had given way beneath her feet. That Gerard whom she loved and who loved her should refuse her anything that she could ask seemed to her impossible. It was true that she had not been economical ; she had not tried to be. Indeed for the last weeks she had asked for money more and more often, had asked for it of intention and had spent it wantonly. It was part of her programme. And now at the moment when money was

really essential to her he was refusing it, was failing her. She could not know that he was really worried about money, that he had only that morning been examining his passbook and that he had been shocked at its state. She could not know that he had that morning written to his bank asking them to place another two hundred pounds to his credit on the strength of securities of his that they held. She could not know all this, but even if she had known she would have been astonished none the less at his refusal. Until thirty-six hours ago when he had spoken impatiently of her having taken an automobile he had never scolded her for her extravagance. Why should he now when she was asking not for herself but for her friend?

Illona knew men. She knew when to take no for an answer. "Very well, Gerard," she said, "I must find it elsewhere. No, I am not angry, dear. Perhaps you have reason: I don't know. I shall find the money and go back to Meudon, and I shan't come up to-night. I shall sit up with the sister who is with Fleurette. Victor doesn't expect me; he's let me off. Au revoir, Gerard; I shall see you at the Trianon to-morrow."

Gerard let her go. He was angry. She had put him in the wrong. If he had seen into her heart he would have given her the money. Now she was going to get it elsewhere. How would she do that? From whom would she get it? If it were not too late, if he knew which way she had gone, he would go after her and take her to the bank. But it was too late. His resentment mixed itself with jealousy. From whom would she get the money?

And in the meantime Illona was in her room going through her poor little store of jewels. Everything she had, save the ring Gerard had given her, she took to the pawnbroker. He would only give her six hundred francs. The day was getting on. She knew hardly anyone who would be in Paris now. At last she was forced to go to Victor. Luckily she found him at his work. It was a mere chance. Certainly she could have the money and she could return it when she liked. He still had a *beguin* for his dancer and could not forbear asking her why she had not got the money from her lover: "He's not so very generous, is he?" he asked.

Illona flared up at once. "I couldn't see him. He's gone to London, and I wanted it immediately. He'd have given me ten times as much if he'd been here—so there!"

She did not like talking about her affairs or about Fleurette's folly. She had even avoided telling Victor for what purpose the money was wanted. She knew that if she had done so he would have insisted on paying the thousand francs himself or at least half of it. But that would have vexed her. She had shouldered the burden and she would have thought it wrong to share it with anyone else.

All the same she took back with her to Meudon a heavy heart. She had come near to quarrelling with Gerard, and she was not yet ready to quarrel with him; she had not yet the strength. Still, she hoped, she might have a few happy weeks. And then she thought of Fleurette and of Fleurette's fate.

CHAPTER VI

GERARD learned very little more about Fleurette Mayer's funeral than the papers told him. It was a subject that both he and Illona avoided, Illona because she felt sore at his refusal of what after all was no very great sum of money, and he because he had in his heart an idea, unconfessed even to himself, that he had not behaved well, that he had chosen the wrong moment to tighten his purse strings : the thousand francs had not been wanted for some extravagant and unnecessary luxury ; Illona, poor child, had really felt herself bound to provide it ; at any rate the impulse he had done his best to thwart was a generous one. And then he wondered how she had managed. He presumed that in some way she had raised the thousand francs, but he was too proud to ask her how. People did not talk to him much about the ceremony. Even Ferrat, who had come back from Beg-Meil for a couple of days and who spent her nights in the Trianon and the Esqueline, was unwilling to talk about her dead friend. . . .

Illona's idea that after all she did not object to Gerard coming to see her dance at the Trianon was not,

from his point of view, a success. At first he had welcomed it, but he soon found that what he had hoped would be a pleasure was in truth an ordeal. She had regained her old supremacy, and, to him at least, she seemed to have got back most of her gaiety. Every night she made new admirers, and old ones returned to their allegiance. She had hardly a moment to herself, and his remonstrances effected nothing at all.

"Illona, can't you pick and choose whom you talk to? It can't be necessary to spend time with everyone who calls you or to dance with all those scoundrels."

She looked at him and answered quietly, with a certain patience: "My dear, it isn't necessary in one way, but it is in another. I have to live. Victor pays me to be pleasant with everyone who comes. And they pay me too. I must have money. I don't want to ask you for money every day, *tu sais*. And perhaps they are not so bad as they look. I have experience; I can keep them from going too far,"

"But, my pet, it makes me unhappy to see you dancing with some of these men. . . . And then the people you sit and talk to; I can see the sort of things they are saying to you. The girls too, the other dancers and the women who aren't dancers——"

"You're a little exigent, Gerard; that's not fair. You know well that I am only for you, and, after all"—she shrugged her shoulders—"if you are in the same society with a lot of pigs you must be nice to them—otherwise they'll eat you up, *tu sais*. Now I must go and dance again. Be patient a little; at three I shall be free."

Gerard tried to be patient, but, by what seemed the irony of fate, after her dance Illona was called to the table next to him and sat there laughing and talking to a young-looking but elderly American with a double chin and a pink face whom she evidently knew but who to-night was accompanied by his wife, a pretty woman, gentle and shrinking, who looked as if she was frightened out of her life by the world in which she unexpectedly found herself. Gerard did his best not to listen to their conversation, but it was impossible not to hear its drift. The American was from Philadelphia. Gerard recognised his name; he belonged to one of those families whose riches have given them an almost feudal importance, and really he didn't seem a bad fellow. He explained to his wife that in the year before he had come here often, that he had learned to dance here—"It's quite true, Madame," Illona interrupted; "and he's very generous, your husband; we were always glad to see him come"—and that Illona was the best dancer he knew. "You ought to come to America and start a school," he went on; "Mrs Capern would help you, wouldn't you, my dear? But you wouldn't have to dance in that costume. No; America wouldn't stand for it."

Illona, who was wearing her Russian dress, looked at the wife and asked if she found it so very shocking.

"Not at all, my dear; not at all. It suits you very well; and it must be very convenient to dance in—except for those high loose boots."

"You don't know why she wears those high boots, Julia. I'll tell you. She might have known that I was

coming. They're high and loose like that in order that old fools like me may drop gold pieces into them. Isn't that so, Illona? There's a louis anyway."

Illona smiled and Gerard winced.

"It'll be lonely, that louis, Monsieur; and it'll be so loose by itself that it'll hurt me when I dance."

Mrs Capern laughed and her husband dropped another louis into the boot.

"Two—and then?"

"Three—and then?"

But the American had come to the end of his gold. He offered a five-franc piece with a smile of derision.

"No, no, no," Illona said; "*ça ne marche pas*. But, Monsieur, my other boot! It is jealous. What will you do for it? They live together, you know, these two boots, and they'll quarrel like anything if one has made a lot of money and the other has nothing at all."

"She has you there, Jim," Mrs Capern said; "you've got some bills, haven't you?" and the American, nothing loth, dropped a hundred-franc note into the other boot.

Illona jumped up. "*Merci, Monsieur, et bonsoir—au revoir, Madame*. I hope you will come again"; and she ran off to the lavatory to put the money she had earned in some safer place.

And in the meantime Gerard bit his nails.

Such scenes irritated Gerard but they did not disgust him. What often disgusted him was not the frank commerce of the place but the commerce that went on beneath its surface. He had learned—for Illona

had told him and he had seen for himself—that all this glitter, this noise, this sprinkling of fine ladies, this flinging to and fro of balls and distribution of souvenirs hid things that were ugly, mean, vicious; he had learned what Victor's young women were supposed or allowed to do for his clients and their admirers. He had heard them talking together. He had seen them go upstairs to the private rooms, the existence of which most of the clients did not even suspect, and he had listened to what they had to say when they came down again. He had been made free of their councils, and his blood would sometimes cease to run in his veins as he listened. And this was the centre of the gaiety of Paris, itself the gay centre of Europe, of the world. The truth as he learnt it was that there existed no vice so degraded that Victor and his kind would not wink at if it brought them a few francs, and that they would not assist if they could make a few louis. Kindly men, yes; good fathers of families, perhaps; but men of business first, trafficking in wares that all the world wanted, and trafficking so skilfully that only those who bought need see or hear the truth.

Gerard used to wonder whether in Montmartre anyone ever paused to consider what they were doing for Paris, for France, for the world, with their gay inventions; whether they realised that they were eating out their country's vitals, corroding all its fair metal, poisoning its blood. Illona, he knew, hated it all; he knew too that if she had her way she would leave her world for ever, would exchange it for almost any,

work in which she could keep herself and her mother in tolerable comfort. "But in France what else is there for a girl to do who hasn't any money of her own? I keep myself better than the others, yes—but after all, am I so very different? It can't be helped; it's always been and always will be. *Et voilà!* You can't take me away—and so I stop. Perhaps it is all I am good for."

As much as anything Gerard worried himself over the way in which ladies, curious or unsuspecting, went to a place like the 'Trianon. The Esqueline was frankly for a class and did little harm; but the Trianon was smart: it was the thing to go to it if you belonged to the world that amuses itself and spends money. Perhaps no one, not even English or Americans, brought young girls, but young husbands took their young wives, and danced with them; in the first hours after midnight the room held as many ladies as it held women who were not ladies. Did they, did their men, know what it was all about? It was picturesque and amusing, yes, and gay much of it, and very human, but underneath there was a clotted mass of foul happenings, a degraded, ugly, unnatural world.

And Gerard, who was no puritan and who cared very little for what happened to his fellows, holding that every man should learn to look after himself, watched and questioned. Sometimes indeed he would feel inclined to interfere, to warn. He would see young Englishmen, young Americans, clean, healthy of body and of mind—he would see them drift into this world and he knew where almost of a certainty their curiosity would lead them.

“Don’t talk to me about all that,” Illona would say; “*ça me dégoûte!*” They needn’t come if they don’t choose. Yes, they’ll often be sorry: that’s very likely. Look round: you know most of these girls almost as well as I do; you know what they are *au fond*—some of them anyhow. I told you once before—in Aix—that we all laugh at young Englishmen, but *tout de même* I’m sometimes unhappy for them. The best of them, and the youngest, fall in love. *Tant pis pour eux!*”

CHAPTER VII

GERARD knew that something had gone awry in his relations with Illona. He could see that she was not happy as she had been ; he was not happy himself. What had possessed her when she had suggested his coming to the Trianon to see her dance, to see her at her work ? Perhaps it was that which was at the root of his disquiet. He hated to see her at everyone's beck and call, the plaything of every tourist with enough money to pay for a couple of bottles of champagne ; he detested her dancing with clients, and even more he detested the way in which people looked at her when she danced alone or with one of her comrades. Often he was tempted to believe that she was careless of what he thought or even that she did things on purpose to hurt him, to make him jealous. She seemed through some unholy coincidence to choose always for her attentions the very men who had most the power of disgusting or infuriating him. She appeared sometimes to carry her comedies far further than she need, as if she took pleasure in the society in which she found herself. . . Yes, he saw and suspected all this, but still he loved her so much, still her dark beauty held him so much in bondage, that he never thought of quarrelling with

her. For hours he would sit and watch her, having occasionally a crust of her regard thrown to him, and, although he was not content, he seldom put his resentment into words. But the resentment was there all the same.

And then too he resented the fact that he had himself behaved meanly, stupidly, in the matter of Fleurette Mayer's funeral. He knew that he had an excuse, but he knew also that it was not a very good one, and that in any case Illona did not believe in it. He suspected too, although she had assured him that she was not angry at his refusal, that it had gone very much against her grain, had shocked her, had hurt her and had made her bitter. One day he tried in a half-hearted sort of way to win her forgiveness.

"Illona, I want to tell you something: you remember about Fleurette. I wish I had not been in such a hurry——"

"Oh, don't let us talk about that, Gerard, *je t'en prie*. It's finished now. Let's talk about something else."

"No, dear, I will talk about it. You were in a hurry too and went off without giving me time to change my mind. I'd have done what you wanted if you'd asked me again——"

"I believe you would, Gerard—but it's nothing now I was unhappy for a little; that's all."

"But how did you arrange?"

"I did arrange—that is enough, Gerard."

"But I want to know, sweetheart."

"I dare say, my dear, but what must be your master I won't tell you."

"Will you let me give you the thousand francs now so that you can pay it back if you did borrow it?"

"No, I will not. You may keep your thousand francs; you said you couldn't spare it, you know. But don't talk about it any more, please, Gerard."

There was something feminine and illogical about her refusal to take the money he offered, but that did not at the moment occur to him, and it certainly never occurred to her. Since the episode of the thousand francs she had asked him to pay several bills; she had shown no signs of making those economies which she had been so ready to promise; she had proved as expensive to him in the weeks that had just passed as at any time in their acquaintance. It was true that she had already paid Victor back his four hundred francs out of the proceeds of her own work, but that was from a stubborn and superstitious determination to accept no penny of Gerard's money for Fleurette, and from a wish to rest not a moment longer than was necessary under an obligation to her too attentive employer. Her jewels could remain for the moment *au clou*. She did not need them.

Defeated in his attempt at putting himself right with his self-esteem and at wiping out of Illona's memory the one mean passage in his relations with her, Gerard bethought himself, not unselfishly, of another way of pleasing her.

"Illona, you are dancing too much. You ought to have a holiday. The hot weather is telling on you. Listen, sweetheart: I could get away now. I could take you for a fortnight to the sea. It would be almost like July last year. The only thing is we'd have to go

near Bordeaux. 'They'd understand my being there; they'd think it was for business'—Gerard always spoke to Illona of his wife as "they"—"but I've heard of some jolly places with good bathing. Let's go at once."

She made no reply and Gerard, not looking at her, called for the time-table.

"Soulac's the place to choose, I think. It's near enough to Bordeaux. We'd go there naturally sometimes, and we'd be making trips about the neighbourhood, so it would be all right for my letters. When could you start, my pet? Wait a minute, though: let me see how the trains run." And he became immersed in a page of figures.

Illona the while was suffering as she had never suffered before, no, not even when Gerard had left her at Mâcon. The idea of going away with him again, of having him entirely to herself for weeks together, of living over afresh the happy days at Le Lavandou, tempted her to forget all her plan, to forget everything indeed, to give herself up once more to such joy as she could snatch from fate. Surely she would be able to take this last chance of happiness and yet come back unweakened, strengthened perhaps, to carry out what she intended. But even as she thought of this she knew that she was deceiving herself. If she gave way now, if she faltered at all, then she could never get strength again. She sat for a minute watching Gerard. Her heart went out to him, to his qualities and his faults, to his generosity and his meanness. She must leave him. *Il le fallait!* There was his boy, his boys. If now she went away with him she knew in her heart that she would stop with him for ever—no, not for ever, for some day he would tire

of her, but for so long that he would be harmed too deeply, for so long that all the mischief that she feared would have come to pass. Nowadays she read his mind like an open book. She could anticipate his moods and his wishes; and she knew that money was becoming for him really an anxiety and a care. If they had been alone she would have gone to him now and put her arms round him and drawn his head down to her breast and have kissed his hair and his eyes. Oh, if she could keep her arms round him for all his life, cherish him, protect him! She knew so well how to make him content and happy; she knew so well how to answer to his moods; even she had begun to share his interests and his simpler pleasures. But there was his wife, and there were his children, the children that should have been hers, that she could have loved. . . .

"Well, Illona, what do you say? How quickly can you be ready? We'll travel by night, eh?" There was a hard, practical note in his voice, and there leapt to her mind, unbidden, the memory of Fleurette and of his meanness and the idea that this excursion that he was suggesting was intended to make her forget, to cancel, the past. A hot resentment came to her aid.

"Gerard, what would all that cost? The journey and all our expenses down there?"

"Oh, I don't know, pet. About a thousand francs perhaps—it depends on what we do, of course."

"A thousand francs—that is the amount I asked you to give me for Fleurette, Gerard."

"I know; but what has that to do with it?"

"In my mind it has a lot to do with it. I can't help

remembering that you couldn't give me the money. It wasn't really for myself: it was for my friend, and I haven't so many friends, *tu sais*. I told you how much it was wanted, but you couldn't afford such a sum then, Gerard, and it wouldn't be reasonable for you to spend it now. No, I won't help you spend a thousand francs on me just because you fancy I'm not looking well—although it would be spending it on yourself too, of course, and on your own pleasure. You are like every other man; you think first of yourself; you are too *egoïste*, Gerard—it would be a good thing for me to go to the sea, but, what is far more important, it would amuse you—*hein?* I love you, my dear—but I understand you too.”

He looked at her with astonishment. What did all this portend? What did it mean? He had realised, of course, that his refusal to pay for Fleurette's funeral had hurt Illona, but her sudden onslaught amazed him. It was not of a piece with her character as he conceived it. Surely she was overdone: her dancing and the hot weather were making her neurasthenic, hysterical. Well, he must humour her:

“There, there, Illona sweetheart; of course you understand me. Who should if you don't? I know you want a holiday—you shall have one, and you shall forget that I didn't do what you asked me to do, that I was mean if you like, and that I am so selfish and horrible. We'll enjoy ourselves just as much as we did at Le Lavandou, more perhaps, for we know each other better. But how soon can you be ready?”

“Gerard, I tell you truly: I could be ready to-morrow.

But I won't go. No, I won't: it's useless your asking me. I'd be ashamed if I did. I'll stop in Paris—you go away, if you like: go to Pont-Aven; go anywhere. I dare say I want a holiday, but I'll do without one. Perhaps later on I'll go, but not now. It's a punishment for me not to go, and it's a punishment for you too. Poor Fleurette! I did so little for her when she was alive: perhaps I could have saved her; and then, when she was dead, I could hardly bury her."

Gerard neither understood Illona's mood nor the logic of what she had been saying. He had been annoyed at her refusal to listen to his half-hearted apology and at her refusal to take his thousand francs. Her objection to going away with him and her bitter accusation of selfishness turned his annoyance into anger. What right had she to talk to him like that? It was because he had put his foot down—once; he would have been justified, have been far more sensible, if he had put it down long ago. He had given her thousands of francs, much more, certainly, than it was reasonable for him to have given her. She knew no moderation, and now apparently she had no gratitude. Yes, perhaps what she said was just: he did want to go away as much for his own sake as for hers. Her refusal was a disappointment to him. He had the right to expect her to come—more, he had the right to tell her to come. But he would not exercise it. He would take her at her word, and she should learn that she could not afford to treat him with caprice, that she could not play fast and loose with impunity.

These thoughts coursed through his head, and Illona sat and watched him, longing for him to persist. She

wanted so much to give way: she wanted so much to fling all her pride and resentment to the winds. But she knew herself to be at the parting of the ways. If she yielded now she would yield always. She did nothing and she said nothing to show him how near she was to capitulation, nor how false and weak was the attitude that she had adopted with so brave a front. And she kept back the tears from her eyes.

Then he spoke: "Very well, Illona; you know your own business best. As a matter of fact I didn't think of a holiday for myself; I don't want one—but after all August is jolly dull in Paris, and I will go down to-morrow to Pont-Aven for a week. Perhaps by the time I'm back you'll have forgotten how selfish I am and you'll be in a better temper. I'm not so bad as you think me all the same. But I must go to my office now. You can drop me at the corner, if you like."

It was as if he had struck her. That he would resent her refusal, her double refusal, she expected, and she wished him to be resentful, but that he should actually be willing to go away to Pont-Aven and to leave her alone in Paris, that he should not remember that after all she had stopped in Paris for his sake, that he should already be so careless of their love—these things seemed to her unthinkable, an outrage. She had hardly the strength to answer:

"No, I'm not going home; I shall go for a drive in the Bois. I don't want you to come with me. And Gerard, don't look for me to-night—go to-night to Pont-Aven. I would rather not see you till you come back—truly I would."

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN she reached the Bois, Illona dismissed her taxi, found a secluded seat and gave herself over to the unhappy consideration of what had occurred. The fact that it fitted very well into the plan she had prepared made it none the less miserable for her to think about. The scene had been unpremeditated; the storm, if it could be called a storm, had come out of a calm sky. Everything she had said she regretted bitterly; she would have given all she had to recall the phrases in which she had arraigned her lover's selfishness. They were all true, but—but she had hurt herself in saying them, hurt herself, she knew, more than she had hurt Gerard whose complacency was a triple armour. Now she was tempted to go quickly out of the Bois, to find a telephone and to beg him to forgive her, to forget what she had said, to take her away from Paris as he had planned. She sat for an hour fighting her battle. She knew so well that if she did telephone he would laugh at her, would speak to her as if she were a spoilt child, and would forget the incident. Then they would go to the sea, and in their happiness everything she had

schemed would crumble, her own heart would grow soft again in her lover's arms, and the little resentments that she knew he carried against her, her extravagance, her way of life, would all of them vanish. Once more she would have over him her old power and she might never again have the heart to eat it away. She knew her strength; she knew that if she chose she could hold Gerard for years to come; perhaps she could hold him for ever. All that angered him in what she did was not really a part of her character; so much of it was intentional, invented at the moment to vex him, to lessen his affection, to destroy his confidence. Her very extravagance she could, if she chose, put away so easily. She owed now little or nothing; she had no need of more money than she earned. Gerard had loved her most when she had been most natural, most simple, at Aix and in the weeks that followed. She asked so little of life. To see her lover sometimes, never to quarrel with him, to know that soon his arms would be round her, that she might wake to find her head on his shoulder: so would she be content. Perhaps he would take her to London, and, even remembering her mother, she could live there on less money than she cost him now. . . .

Of a sudden she jumped up. "I'm a fool," she said. "I forget his boys; I forget everything. No, I've begun now, and I will, I will go on"; and for a moment she paused and prayed to her God to give her strength.

Meanwhile Gerard was wasting no time. If he was to

go away he had better go at once. 'To-night, certainly, would be as easy as to-morrow. He had left Illona in a mood of considerable resentment, and as he tidied up his desk at the office, ate his solitary dinner and packed his bag, he thought of her with little kindness. Her attitude was incomprehensible to his intelligence except on the easy ground that she was ill and not herself, and he sincerely believed that if he went to her now he would find her crying and ready enough to fall in with his plans. In his heart that was what he wished to do. But she had wounded his pride; it would be as well to teach her a lesson; and his mind began unconsciously to search about for fuel for his anger. After all, she had sent him away herself. She had not even asked for his address. Well, she would not be able to write to him and she should do without his letters. It was strange this difference. They had not been two days apart since he had found her again at the Trianon four months ago. He began to think of her love, of the way in which she tended him when they were alone, of her deep sombre eyes, of her dear hands and her quick wish to please him. . . . And then he fell asleep in his berth, and, arriving the next morning at Pont-Aven, forgot Paris and his business, Illona and all that had been his habit, in his pleasure at being with his children. Not a corner of that countryside did they leave unvisited and unexplored. Picnics, bathing, fishing, sailing made up the tale of his seven days.

CHAPTER IX

AT first Illona could hardly bring herself to believe that her lover had gone away. It was true that she had said she did not wish to see him, but surely he would come to bid her good-bye, or he would write to her. But when hour after hour of the night passed without his appearance, and when the next morning no letter arrived and no message to summon her to lunch, why then she gave up hope. Did her love count for so little? Had she so small a place in his life? They had quarrelled a little; she had said to him some of the bitter thoughts that had risen unbidden in her mind—but was that enough to make him go off without a word? Her first forenoon was a chain of bitter minutes. She did not dare to telephone to his office. If he was there he would be angry. If he had gone away her calling might compromise him—or so he seemed to think. The day dragged itself away. She had not the heart to get up and dress; she wished to see no one. When the night came, when the last post had passed her door and she was ready to go off to her work, she felt far nearer breaking down in a passion of tears than

dancing, laughing. . . . Where *was* Gerard? How could she write to him when she had not even his address? Well, she would write all the same—the letter could go to-morrow, for surely in the morning there would be something for her. Jeanne should bring it to her the moment it arrived. She would not want to sleep.

“Gerard, *chéri à moi*, why have you gone away and left your little Illona all alone with her heart pressed together and broken? I want you so much, *mon amant*, so much more than ever before. I want your arms round me; I want to rest my little head on your shoulder. I could not believe you had gone. Be not *fâché* with me, Gerard. I shall die if you leave me. You are all I have in the world, more than my mother, more than anything. For me you are a religion. I would die to do you good. And here I am like a little dog who has lost her master. All the time *j’ai envie de pleurer*. Oh, I am so miserable; I did not know there was so much misery in the world. . . .”

She broke off suddenly. What good could come of her writing such a letter? It told the truth but it told more of the truth than it would be well for her lover to know. He was everything in the world for her but it was necessary that he should value her love for him at a far lower rate. Rather must he think her exigent, wilful, capricious, light. He must never again suspect that separated from him she could welcome no future, could draw no breath of content, imagine no happiness. She read over what she had written, and then, lighting a match, slowly burnt it, watching its phrases shrivel

away in the flame until there was nothing left but a heap of black ash. Oh, how she loved him ! How much every fibre, every pulse of her being cried out for his presence ! Why, why, she asked herself, should this man have such power over her ? It was not only that at the beginning he had treated her as if she was a human being rather than a plaything, that he had dealt with her as if he respected her—no, it was more than that : her heart was his for some deep reason that she could not fathom, could not guess. If he were ill, she would be ill with him ; were he to die, she would die at his side ; should he starve, then willingly would she share his crust and count herself content. She stretched out her hands as if to call him back ; a sob burst in her throat. “Gerard, Gerard, understand me, in spite of everything ; see with your heart, Gerard, that I am not what I make myself appear, that I am worthy of you and of your love ; never let me go out of your life ; hold me to you so that I may serve you always. I ask so little of you, Gerard : I will be a little dog at your door ; I will grudge none of your happiness ; I will forgive your wife—oh, Gerard, never leave me.” She sank on her couch, weeping bitterly, and then dry sobs took the place of her tears. After awhile she fell on unconsciousness. . . .

“Madame, Madame, wake up, wake up ! Here it is one o’clock and you have fallen asleep and Monsieur Victor has sent a chasseur for you. Wake up ! ”

Jeanne, looking very ridiculous without her false hair and in one of her mistress’s discarded dressing-gowns, had no easy task. Illona came slowly to consciousness.

She had fainted rather than fallen asleep, and as she opened her eyes she felt for her lover and held out her arms to draw him to her. . . .

“Why, Jeanne, where am I! What has happened? Why are you there?”

Jeanne hastened to reassure her. Monsieur Victor did not like his dancers to disappoint him. “There, you’re dressed; all you need is to bathe your eyes—they look sleepy—and to powder a little. Wait—” and she ran out to tell the *chasseur* that he should be followed in less than five minutes.

Illona’s chauffeur, tired of waiting, had already taken himself off; there was no time for Jeanne to dress and go out to find another taxi. Luckily the Place Gerardo was no far cry and the walk through the cool night brought back Illona’s control. She was too great a favourite both of his own and of his clients for Victor to be really angry with her. He scowled at her arrival but she laughed him out of countenance and in a minute, having tossed her cloak to an attendant, she was in the most complicated figure of a *maxixe*. Misery gnawed at her heart, but no one of her companions, no one of her admirers, knew or suspected that she was anything else than what she seemed, the soul of irresponsible, wayward gaiety, a figure of caprice.

So passed the week. Through the day Illona would lie on her bed, staring at nothing, refusing to be comforted, refusing to see her friends or to talk to Jeanne; at night she would dance and dance, and as long as she could carry half-a-dozen friends in her train she would

refuse to go home. Every morning found her at the Pré-Catalan. Any place, any madness was better than her own room, the solitude of her own thoughts. But when at last she was forced to return she would creep up her stairs, fearful of her own footsteps, and would let herself furtively into her hall with a heart beating at the hope that there would be a letter for her and at the fear that once again she would find herself forgotten.

And on the ninth night, just as she had taken her place at the side of an elderly admirer and had demanded the most expensive supper that the Trianon could produce, she looked up and saw Gerard standing in the door. He caught her eye at once and smiled and beckoned. She shook her head and turned to her host. Poor man, he had his hopes encouraged that night for the first and last time in the history of his siege of Illona's affections. He hardly knew whether he was standing on solid earth. She put up with him; she cajoled him; she looked into his eyes; she allowed him to hold her hand; she fed him with sections of her own peach. And all the time she knew that Gerard was watching her, that he was near enough to hear most at least of what she said and what was said to her. To the suggestion that she should come to dinner on the following night to the Chateau Madrid she seemed to give a delighted assent—"but I'm not sure; give me your card and if I can't come I'll send you a message." Then she took herself off from the table, saying as she went: "No, I won't go anywhere else to-night—to-morrow perhaps; I was out this morning till ten and I'm tired. *Au revoir* and good dreams; dream of me, mind!"

Gerard expected her to come at once to him, but before he could realise what was happening she was dancing again, this time with an Englishman whom she had every reason to know he particularly disliked and distrusted; and it was not until that dance was over and its successor that she walked slowly across the room to where he was seated and held out her hand:

"*Bonjour, mon ami, comment ça va?* And where have you been? And was it pleasant?"

"Sit down, Illona, sit down at once. I haven't come here to see you playing the fool——"

"'Playing the fool,' my dear! you are not very polite. Your holiday—if you have been away—hasn't improved your manners. No, I can't sit down; later on perhaps. I'm busy now." And she kept Gerard waiting for half an hour before at last she took the seat that he had kept for her, asked for a peach and, looking at him with laughing eyes, remarked that the sun at Pont-Aven had made him rather *moche* and heavy. "It doesn't suit you to look like a black man, *tu sais*."

"Haven't you missed me, Illona?"

"Missed you—of course I have. But that doesn't mean that I haven't enjoyed myself. I've had a splendid time. So have you, I hear. Why didn't you send me some postal-cards?"

"I ought to have written to you, Illona, but——"

"Oh, *pas la peine*, my dear: I was quite content. I only wanted postal-cards for my collection. I hear you made a perfect father. Ferrat told me all about it——"

"Ferrat! What does she know about what I was doing?"

"Oh, she was at Beg-Meil, not far from you, and she ran across you one day. You didn't see her. Oh, I laughed so at her description of you with your *gosses*! A little too much *sans gêne*, I thought. I'm glad I didn't see it. However, as long as you were happy it's all right. When do you go back?"

"Go back? I'm not going back. We arranged that I should go for a week. Surely you remember?"

"I remember nothing, my dear, except that you went off without being polite enough to come and say good-bye."

"That wasn't my fault, Illona—you told me not to; you haven't forgotten that?"

"And of course you believed me! You are not very intelligent, Gerard. That is the second time you've done that. I'd be afraid of doing it a third if I were you."

"Illona, did you want me then, after all?"

"Oh, yes—I wanted you; or perhaps I wanted you to be polite rather. It wasn't polite and it wasn't kind to go off like that. But it's done now. We won't talk of it. Why didn't you send me some cards? Why for the matter of that didn't you write to me? I didn't even know your address."

"Because I was a proud and stupid fool, my pet. I am sorry—there! I love you too much not to want to write to you, Illona, but this time I rather supposed you wouldn't want to hear from me—but I did think of you all the time, you know."

"Well, that's *déjà quelquechose*. And now I must go and dance again. I shan't be long."

‘ Illona——’

“ Yes ? ”

“ Ask Victor to let you off now : it’s already two.”

“ No, I wouldn’t do it.”

“ But I’d like you not to dance any more to-night. I want you to myself, sweetheart. It is so long that we have been separated. Now do—please ! ”

She examined him carefully, as if what he had suggested was some ordinary proposition that required reflection before she could decide. “ Well, I will, *chéri* ; but it isn’t because I love you, *tu sais* ; it’s because I’m tired and I want to go home.” The little caress with which she accompanied her words belied their unkindness.

In the minute that Illona kept him waiting, while she went ostensibly to fetch her cloak, she gave herself up to despair. What could come of all this ? How would she have the strength ever to let him go ? . . . But she came to him with a smiling face and as they drove down the hill she nestled into the hollow of his shoulder. He wondered how he could ever have left her alone for so many days, how he could have forgotten her.

CHAPTER X

SEPTEMBER was wearing itself away. Paris was welcoming back its children. After all Gerard and Illona had been to Soulac, but only for a week. For her they were seven days of ecstacy and agony. For Gerard they were sometimes spoiled by her peevishness, the play of her nerves, her capricious unwillingness even to attempt to capture the lover's mood in which their days at Le Lavandou had passed. He also was preoccupied a little. Things in the Paris office were now in order again; Pall Mall could really spare him no longer; his lease of the St Cloud villa was nearly up; the children must return to school. In less than three weeks now he was due back in London. How near their separation was he had not told Illona. But he supposed that she had some idea of the truth. In May and in June, when September seemed so far away, they had spoken often of the length of time they had before them to be happy in. He caught himself wondering whether it was well or ill that their life together was to come to an end. Her beauty, her eyes, her mind, simple and happy like a bird's, drew him still. . . . But there

were ways in which she seemed to have hardened, to have become calloused, less fine. In the matter of money, for instance, she seemed to have grown less and less shy; indeed such diffidence as she had shown at first had disappeared almost entirely. For her to see something that attracted her was actively to want it. He had shown impatience often but she had brushed away what he had to say on the plea that he was ill-tempered, and had laughed and cajoled him back into a temporary acquiescence with her wishes. And yet he had told her frankly that he was not rich enough to satisfy all these whims and she had promised to be more careful, less extravagant: "*tu verras*," she would say, and he would see—would see that she forgot her promise almost as soon as the words were out of her mouth. She had grown more exigent too. Her idea that after all she liked him to come to the Trianon had borne no pleasant fruit. Now, as far as she could, she insisted on his constant presence. And when he was there, instead of remembering him, instead of coming to him often and spending much of her time at his table, she seemed entirely to ignore his existence. To watch her at her work distressed him almost beyond the limit of endurance. Often he felt himself on the point of jumping up, plucking her from her place, and carrying her out of the restaurant in his arms. . . . But it was no good. "You're stupid, Gerard, and jealous about nothing: it's my work, my dear," she would answer him, and he had perforce to be quiet.

Jealousy was not perhaps the wrong word to use. Gerard was jealous, but he was not jealous in any

ordinary sense. He had no doubt of Illona's faithfulness to him. He would have sworn to it. He believed in his heart that she loved him not less but more than she had ever done. He was jealous of her work ; he had become intolerant of her life, of the method of her life, of the people, foul or stupid, that she had to know. He had begun to hate it all, the whole thing, the whole surroundings and atmosphere. "Well, take me away ; I ask nothing better than to leave it," she would say in answer to his protests, and he would sigh and tell her that she knew very well it was impossible.

They went to Soulac with the idea of staying there a full fortnight. To Gerard the idea of varying this plan never occurred. After all Illona was sometimes the Illona of Aix and of the South. In those golden Biscayan days he would often forget all his doubts, and his troubles would fade away into so far a distance that it seemed as if they never were. But for Illona there was no forgetfulness. She had come south with her conscience plucking at her sleeve. She had consented in a moment of weakness and had then failed to summon up strength to say that she had changed her mind. Even when her trunk was packed and she was ready to go to the station she hung back, asking herself whether she should not send her lover a message that after all she preferred to stop in Paris. . . . No, she would go, but she would keep a grip on herself ; she would not allow herself to slip back into the happiness of the past and into forgetfulness of all that she had planned.

And to some extent she had succeeded.

They were lying on the sand under a pine-tree and

looking out to sea to where in the distance a solitary sailing-ship hung, poised like a bird, in the blue of sky and wave. Suddenly Gerard, plucking up courage, turned and took her hand in his:

"Illona, I am so happy, but it makes me miserable when I remember that everything must end so soon."

"Why think of it then, my dear? *Tu es bête, tu sais*. Anyhow we have at least another week."

"I meant more than that, *chérie*. I meant that I must so soon leave France."

She caught her breath, and one hand went up to her heart—but now he was not looking at her, and she answered bravely: "'Leave France'? What do you mean? Oh, I know: yes, it was about now you said you'd be going back to London. Well, my dear, we must make the best of the time we have. And after all, even when you go away I shall see you sometimes. You'll make excuses to come to Paris—*pas*? You won't want to leave your little Illona altogether. But when have you to go?"

He paused a minute to recollect the day they had reached: "In fifteen days: on the 23rd."

"Why then particularly?"

"My boy—Dickie, you know—has to start school again on the 25th."

Illona did not speak for a while. She held back her tears lest if one escaped she should break down altogether. Of course she had known he would be leaving Paris, but somehow she had not thought it would be so soon. He had said September, but she had deceived herself into thinking that he had said autumn, and

autumn might mean October or November. Now the fact was forced on her. Fifteen days! Half a month! What remained to her of happiness she could count in hours. It seemed to her that her heart stopped beating. Her blood ran cold. A weakness seized her. Minutes passed before she could command herself.

"Gerard."

"Yes."

"I thought you must be asleep as you didn't speak. If you have to leave Paris on the 23rd oughtn't you to go back earlier than we planned? I should be willing if you wanted to."

Gerard turned and looked at her. She did not flinch under his gaze.

"Aren't you happy here, Illona? I thought you were, and that you would be sorry to go. I thought we were very happy."

"Oh yes, happy enough. I like Soulac and it's good to bathe and to sit in the sun. But if you want to go back we'll go; it wouldn't break my heart, you know."

It was his turn to pause and think. What did she mean by this new tone she had adopted? She spoke as if she were indifferent to whether they stopped or went away, as if Soulac and Paris were equally amusing and pleasant to her, and as if, moreover, even the idea of his leaving France was of no very great importance. Was he, could he have been, mistaken in her? Did she love him as much as he supposed? Or was her love a fleeting caprice that habit alone kept alive? The questions made him more resentful than unhappy.

"Very well, perhaps you're right: I ought to be look-

ing after things a little. We'll go back to-morrow. You can stop here and read and I'll go and telephone to Bordeaux to get a compartment in the *wagon-lit*."

But next night he woke to find Illona's tears wet on his face.

CHAPTER XI

“GERARD, you go away so soon now—tell me, how often shall I see you afterwards? Shall I ever see you?”

“Of course, pet; you will see me very often: I shall have to come to Paris occasionally, and I can make an excuse to come every two or three weeks, I hope.”

“But you will be so far away, darling. What shall I do without you? I don’t think I shall find it possible. I feel that when I have you no longer I shall die.”

For answer he drew her head down and kissed her lips. She sank closer to him and he could feel a thrill of content run through her body.

“No, Illona, you will not die. London is not far off. We shall be so happy when we do meet that it will make up for the time when we are not together. Perhaps we shall love each other all the more because of the separations—you were getting a little used to me, you know, and that’s why you are so often cross and impatient.”

“You are so, so good when I am like that. You understand me so well. Be patient with me always, Gerard. Remember always what I have been to you.”

that I have loved you more than my life, more than all the world, more than I had ever dreamed that it was possible to love. Remember that ever since I have known you I have been yours and only yours, that I have never had a thought for another, that you have been my king and my master as well as my lover."

"I know, I know, Illona sweetheart. Be quite sure I shall never forget. But you speak as if we were going to be parted for a long time instead of for a few weeks."

"I am so afraid, Gerard."

"There is nothing to be afraid of, little one. I shall think of you always, and you will think of me a great deal, and you won't do the things I don't like—will you? You'll be good."

"You can be sure of that, Gerard. Oh yes, I'll be *bien sage*. Have no fear. You know my life; you know what I have to do. I shall have no secrets from you; I shall tell you everything just as I have always done—*pas?* You do know everything about me, Gerard. I have kept back not even a little secret. Better than my own mother you know me, dear. There are so few days left though before you go."

They were silent for a while. Then Illona spoke again:

"Gerard, I want something from you. I have never had your photograph. I want one, dear; now at once I want one. No, I can't wait until you get back to England. Give it me to-morrow. I ask you, sweetheart; do not refuse me."

"But I haven't got one that's at all like me. I'd better get done in London directly I have a moment's

time. Why, the last photograph I had taken was at Oxford—and that's years ago. I wasn't twenty-two."

"No, I shouldn't like that; I want one that shows you as you are now. I didn't know you then; I am jealous of those years before I knew you, and I don't even want a picture of you from that time. I'll wait after all. You shall get photographed in London and you shall send me the only copy; you mustn't let anyone else have one; you mustn't even have one for yourself. Promise me that; promise me that if you do send one it shall be the only one."

"*If* I send it, Illona! Of course I'll send it. Be sure of that!"

"I'm sure of nothing, dear, not even of you, not even of myself. But I hope—" She paused a moment. "Gerard."

"Yes?"

"There is another thing you must give me. I am a little afraid of asking for it. You will give it me: promise!"

He laughed good-naturedly. "I promise—of course it's something I can give you; it's not a motor-car or a sable coat?"

Her eyes reproached him, but he was not looking at her.

"No, it's nothing like that. I want—I want a photograph of your boy."

"Of Dickie? Whatever do you want that for?"

"I want it, Gerard. And you promised, you know. I remember you told me once that he'd been taken just before he came to Paris—you always said you'd

show it me, but you forgot and I didn't like to remind you. When may I have it—to-morrow?"

"I can't think what you want it for, Illona, but I promised and you shall have it. Yes, I'll bring it to-morrow. No, I won't forget."

The photograph of Dickie which Gerard brought to Illona the next day showed him exactly as she had seen him at the Philadelphia Palace; he wore the same clothes; he had the same tidy, English air. She took the picture and looked at it while Gerard occupied himself with the question of what they should eat. It was as well that his attention was distracted. By the time he was free she had recovered her control.

"Do you think he's like me?"

"Naturally. He's very like you. *Il est mignon et très, très gentil, tu sais. J'aime beaucoup les petits garçons, moi.* But we won't talk of that. It's useless. . . . Gerard, are you quite sure you do not mind my having his picture?"

"Mind your having it? Of course not. Why?"

"Oh, nothing—I only thought. He's your boy, *et moi, je suis seulement ta maîtresse*——"

"Illona!"

"*Pardoa, Gerard. Je suis bête—pas?* I'm happy with it, you know, so, so happy. Now we'll talk of something else."

CHAPTER XII

IN two more nights Gerard^f was to start for England. The minutes seemed to Illona to pass away like drops of her own blood, taking with them all her strength, all her will. Yet she was gay; she refused to steal even an hour from her work. Gerard reminded her how little was now left to him and begged that she would at least stay most of the¹ time with him, that she would sup with him, and spend with him all the intervals between her dances.

"It's not possible, my dear! You forget: as you are going it is all the more necessary for me to keep my friends. I can't let them be *fâchés* with me. I have my living to make. It will be three o'clock soon and perhaps we won't go to the Esqueline to-night, if you'd rather not—there!"

"And you won't take your supper with me?"

"No, I can't; I'm going to sup with George." George was a Russian prince, large and good-natured and not very rich, whom she had known for years and for whom in consequence Gerard had a strong dislike.

"But, Illona, that isn't kind of you. It's my la-

night but one, dear. And anyhow you know I don't like that man."

"Naturally you don't like him, Gerard: he's a friend of mine. But he's a good friend, *tu sais*, and I promised to have supper with him and I won't alter. He's come here for me; he wants to dance all the time."

"Then I think I'll go home."

Illona's face grew hard. Her eyes narrowed. So much he could see; he did not look carefully; he did not look into her eyes; he did not see that gradually her lips began to quiver and her hand to tremble.

"Please yourself, my dear. Perhaps it would be better. I shall be very busy." She turned then quickly and left him. It was time. Many minutes passed before she came back into the restaurant, and when she came, Gerard, who had been watching for her, found something new and strange in her appearance. Perhaps it was because she had been angry. Even in this surrounding, even as she danced and laughed an answer to what was said to her, she had an air so remote, so finely serious, that more than ever before he vexed his spirit with questions of what she was doing in this world of the devil, by what infernal mischance or wanton trick of destiny she had been dedicated to such a mockery of joy and pleasure. But he knew better than to encourage such thoughts. After all, you could not be in this world without being of it. Illona was of it surely. . . . He was still bitterly resentful of her refusal to spend these hours with him, of the method of her refusal, and of her reason. If he had the strength of character he would have done

as he had threatened—or no, perhaps he had better be frank with himself: if he must quarrel with her, then it should be at some moment when he could make her feel the bitterness of his anger. Here in the Trianon she had only to walk away from him, as indeed she had just done. It would be a poor satisfaction to leave her so.

He sat on and smoked cigar after cigar and was almost impolite to such of Illona's *camarades* as came to talk to him.

At three o'clock punctually she came herself. Till then she had ignored his presence and he had resolutely avoided looking at her.

"I'm ready, if you like. I'm glad you didn't go home after all. You are stupid, Gerard, sometimes."

They walked out on to the Place and Gerard gave the chauffeur the address in the Square Moncey.

"Oh no, oh no, *alors*! I don't go home yet," Illona interrupted; "you nearly spoiled my evening and now I wish to be a little cheered up. We'll go to the Pagoda first for a while. I want to dance some more."

They spent an hour at the Pagoda and an hour at the Esqueline before Illona would consent to go home. He was patient with her; he hid his resentment. But as the hours passed his anger grew. Why should she treat him in this way? Why, indeed, did he allow it? No doubt she thought that as he was going away he would no longer be of much use to her. At the moment she was dancing and he had leisure to encourage his black thoughts. Perhaps after all her story of spending the last winter hoping and longing for him, faithful

her memory of him, was a lie. Perhaps he too was a *miché* like all the other men he had seen to-night. Well . . .

Driving from the Esqueline to the Square Moncey neither Gerard nor Illona spoke. The nights were lengthening and it was still dark. Gerard could not see his companion's face. For the moment during which they waited for the door to open he had an impulse to leave her and she turned to him as if expecting him to go, for she had learned in these months to respond to, to anticipate, his moods. He saw her movement and the impulse to go died at once. His nerves were on edge. He followed her up the staircase, allowed her, for the first time for weeks, to unlock her own door, and followed her into her room.

Illona's first movements were to throw off her cloak and to put it carefully on a hanger. Then she rubbed her eyes, yawned a little, and spoke: "We stopped too long: I'm tired this morning. So are you, my poor dear. We go to sleep quickly, eh?"

For the moment Gerard made no answer. He looked at her moodily, and taking off his overcoat and opera hat and laying them on one side, he sat down.

"If you are so tired why didn't you come home sooner?"

"Because I didn't want to, my poor Gerard."

"Stop brushing your hair, Illona! Come here a minute: I want to speak to you."

"Well?" She came obediently to his side and looked down at him.

"Illona, it is time that you and I came to an understanding. I am going back to England to-morrow."

"I know it, Gerard."

"Well, ever since you've known it you've altered in your way of treating me. Never before have you behaved as you did to-night."

"Why, what did I do?"

"You know very well what you did. Shall I tell you frankly what you made me feel?"

"Certainly."

"You made me feel that as I was going away, that as I could no longer be of use to you, you had better waste no more time with me, that it would be well to find someone else to take my place——"

"Oh, Gerard!" she moaned.

"If I am wrong it certainly is not my fault. You are responsible for making me think it. You have been going on in that way for weeks."

"And I really make you feel that I should do that—that I should give anyone else your place? Gerard, how can you even say that? You can't feel it. It's impossible after these months we have been together. Sometimes I've been *fautive*, I know, but I've loved you, Gerard, and you've loved me—*pas*? Tell me you didn't really mean what you said."

"But I have felt it, and feel it now. What else could I feel? And after all, need I be surprised?" If she had cried, if she had broken down, he would have understood better, but she showed no signs of breaking down: she was perfectly calm, watching him with eyes wide open as if fascinated. Her self-possession irritated

his nerves still more. "You've let me see more of your life in the last month or two than I'd seen before. I understand more now. You live on fools." His voice rose a little. "Why should I believe that I am not one of them? You've liked me and I've been useful, and to-morrow I go away. Look at to-night. Is that Russian to be my successor?"

"Stop!" Illona bent forward and covered his mouth with her hand. He seized her wrist and forced it away.

"Why should I stop? He's rich, I suppose, richer than I am anyhow."

For answer she drew herself back. "Say no more, Gerard. It isn't necessary. *C'est fini maintenant.*"

He got up: "I know that phrase: you have used it before. Yes, it is finished and I'm going." He bent down and flung his coat over his arm. "It means less to you than it does to me, Illona."

"If you go you will never come back again, Gerard. You understand that?"

"Oh yes, I understand; but it is time I went all the same." He laughed. "Indeed I won't come back again. Don't be afraid. But I want you to know the truth nevertheless. I have loved you, Illona: I have always told you the truth about that. I loved you more than I ever loved anyone. There was almost nothing I would not have done for you. Well—" he raised one hand and opened and closed it as if to show that everything was at an end—"Well, I'm not sorry: through six months I've been a fool, but a happy fool, and luckily the end has come just as I am leaving Paris and I can try to forget you. You have played with me,

Illona, played with me—and worse. But it doesn't matter: I forgive you, for I didn't know it until to-night. And now good-bye—adieu!"

His hand was on the door but before opening it he paused as if expecting her to speak. She made no movement but stood watching him, her eyes wide open, her face set.

In a moment he was gone.

Gerard strode out into the rue Blanche and looked about for a taxi. One came immediately and he told its driver to go to St Cloud. It was light now, but the sun had not yet risen. The cold air was grateful.

He had expected Illona to reply, to defend herself, to attempt to prove that he was mistaken, to protest her love, to break down. She had done none of these things. She had seen him go without protest and unmoved. He had never meant to leave her so quickly and in such a way. Perhaps it was better so. . . .

The driver was making for the Pont de Suresnes and as they neared it the sun rose, flooding all the avenues of the Bois with its pale gold. Gerard stopped the cab and dismissed it. He would walk home. After the hours he had spent the exercise would do him good. The cold sunny air would wash away the foul scent and the clinging memories of Montmartre. He had finished with all that life. He would never go back to it; no, he would never go near it. He had had enough. And it had cost him enough too, had cost him enough in money, and in health perhaps. Yet he regretted nothing. Certainly it had been interesting, this experience; and

after all it was impossible that he should really have done himself any harm: he had not felt so young for years as he had felt during the last six months, so young and so alert. He supposed it was because he had been in love. He smiled. He had been in love; he had made a fool of himself. But it had been worth it. The fact that he had been played with, that Illona had proved unworthy in the end of all the affection he had given her, had after all not so very much to do with the matter. He had believed in her during all those weeks, and he had cared for her, had lived in a kind of golden haze of delight. Nothing could destroy those memories. But she had become very strange. Surely he was well out of it all. If it had gone on, heaven only knew where it would have led him. He might have taken her to London. In any case he would have seen her again and again in Paris. There had been a time when she had been worthy of everything he had been able to give her, his love, his affection—yes, and his respect. There had been a sort of Indian summer of what was fine and unspoiled and honest in her character. But it had not lasted. It could not withstand the influence of the life she led. Now he was to have a successor. But she would never care for any successor as she had, for a few brief weeks, cared for him. Poor little Illona! There was nothing he could do for her. Some years of youth she had still before her. . . .

Why should he allow her fate to weigh on his spirit? He had treated her well. In effect it was she who had dismissed him. She had thrown him aside like a squeezed orange. It was the habit of her class. He drew a deep

breath of the air of the hillside, determined to forget all that had been ugly in what he had done in the last eighteen months, and let himself into his house.

It was nearly seven o'clock. In the kitchen regions the cook was stirring. He made his way quietly upstairs, hoping not to wake his household, but Mary's door opened and she came out to him: she had heard his step on the gravel and his key in the door and had hastened to welcome him. On that sun-flooded landing, in her English dressing-gown and with her hair down her back she looked strangely girlish. The contrast between his home and the world he had just left flashed across his mind as she came to him and put her arms on his shoulders and kissed him:

"This is jolly, Gerard, your coming back when I didn't even hope for you. But what brings you home at such an hour? I'm really rather ashamed of you—still in evening dress too!"

"I'm ashamed myself, Mary, but it's the last time."

"I don't like your being away so much; you know that, Gerard. But it's almost over, this visit to Paris. I'm glad of it: I've seen so much less of you than in London. I thought I should see more. But I know you couldn't help it. Anyhow to-morrow we shall be gone. I am counting the minutes till we're home again. So are the children——"

"I thought they liked being in Paris."

"Only at the beginning. But we always said we wouldn't tell you. They didn't like it because they saw so little of you; and then Dickie misses his cricket. On

had a letter from Clara last night. Everything is quite ready for us, she says, and she's sure I shall like the cook—it is more important that you should like her; after the way in which you have been living in restaurants in Paris, I'm afraid you'll be difficult to please, dear!"

"Not a bit of it, Mary, and, to tell the truth, I shall be delighted to get back to English ways."

"Come and see the children. They're not awake yet. Basil looks such a little darling. The first thing we must do in England is to have his hair cut, and Dickie's too."

Gerard followed his wife into the children's rooms. Vivian they could hardly see. She had rolled herself up in the bedclothes and only the tip of her nose was visible. Gerard drew back the sheet a little. She was breathing regularly, her mouth a little open, her hand under her cheek. He bent down and kissed her, and she stirred happily and smiled.

Dickie woke as they entered his room and sat up in bed. "Hullo, Daddy! What time is it? Why are you dressed like that? It is to-morrow, isn't it, that we go away? I shan't get any cricket but there'll be footer, won't there?"

They turned to Basil. He was still asleep, fat, placid, contented.

Gerard's heart reproached him that he had seen so little of these children of his since they had been in France. All the plans he had made when they first came over had gone by the board. He had meant to show them about and to show them the churches, to

teach Vivian and Dickie something about painting and architecture. He would try to make up for his neglect when they were settled again in Wimbledon. "We must make the most of them now: they won't be babies very much longer, Mary," he said, turning to his wife, and putting his arm round her shoulder.

She smiled with pleasure. Gerard's caresses had been rare recently. "You'll want a bath now, poor dear. How tired you must be! I'll go and light the geyser and it'll be ready when you are. But I wish you could go to bed and have a good sleep."

Gerard too wished that he could go to bed and sleep. He felt that then when he woke he would have been able to cheat himself into believing that the last six months had been a dream. "It's all over now though," he thought. He stepped out on to the balcony of his room, and looked over the Seine towards Paris. "Yes, it's finished, thank heaven! There shall never be anything more like that in my life"; and he tapped on the boys' window and called Dickie to talk to him while he shaved.

And Illona? ?

When the door of the room closed, and then the door of her apartment, she stood for a moment as if she had been changed to stone. She listened for the door of the house to slam and, hearing it, ran to her window. She knew that for a second as he crossed the road she would be able to see her lover. It had been his habit to look up and wave his hand to where she watched him from behind the blind. To-day he passed the corner with

urning. She moaned and went back to where she had been standing. Her strength had gone. Hardly knowing what she did she sank on her knees before the chair which Gerard had just left and which was still warm from his body. Her fingers caressed the cushion and she laid her cheek upon it. What should she do now? What could she do? The light had gone out of her life. He had abandoned her. It was certain that she would never see him again. She had willed it—yes. She knew that she could have kept him, have kept him for ever perhaps. But he despised her now, despised his own love for her. He believed, really believed, that she was what she had made herself appear: a wanton, a woman who had played with his love for the sake of what he could give her, and who was ready now to give his place to another. She had loved him so much, had loved him with all her force. If only she could die. She had not the courage to take her own life. Perhaps God would take pity on her and let her die. But there was her mother: what would her mother do if there was no one to support her? Her heart seemed ready to split asunder with the misery it carried. Tears came slowly to her aid. "*Aidez-moi, mon petit bon Dieu, aidez-moi; laissez-moi mourir,*" she cried. She slipped, fainting, to the floor. Words came incoherently to her lips: "Come to me, Gerard, come quickly. Take me in your arms. Warm my heart. Console me. I shall die, dear, if you cease to love me. Tell me that it is not true, that it is only a dream. Oh, my heart, how it is! Do not leave me, Gerard. . . . A-ah! I feel . . . now. My darling Gerard, it was all a mistake of

your little Illona—*pas?* She was a fool. Now kiss .
again, Gerard."

So Jeanne found her three hours later and thoug
that she was dead. But Illona was at odds with fortu
and her God had forgotten her.

[THE END.]







